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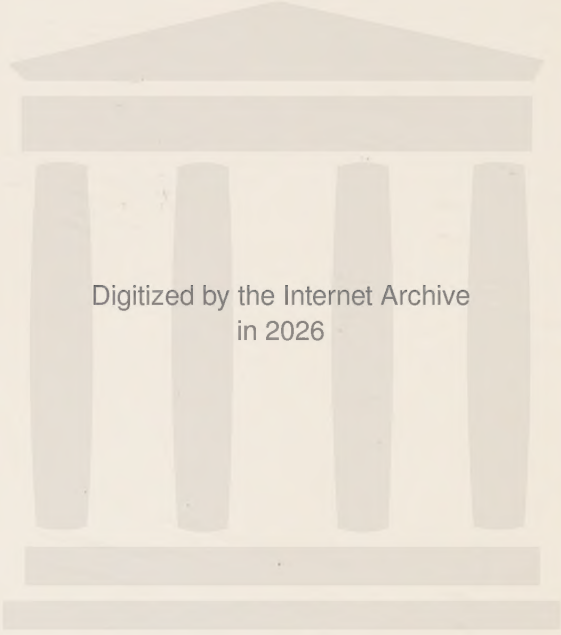
JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY



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JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

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JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

EDITED BY
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EDITOR OF
"TRAVELLERS' TALES AND SKETCHES"
ETC.

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PREFACE

THIS book offers a collection of one-act plays on somewhat similar lines to Mr J. W. Marriott's well-known *One-Act Plays of To-day*. Every item is an original play by a modern author of repute, and an attempt has been made to secure the greatest possible variety in length, subject-matter, and treatment. It is obvious, however, that the needs and interests of younger pupils require special consideration in a volume of this kind. There must be action of the more robust and even boisterous type; the dialogue must be simple rather than sophisticated, the humour direct rather than subtle. Youthful performers generally welcome the element of noise, and are not slow to seize opportunities for song, 'dressing up,' and lively movement. For this reason certain plays have been included not so much for their literary qualities as for their value as pure fun or healthy entertainment. In stimulating appreciation of the stage and developing the sense of what is worth while from the point of view of acting one cannot afford to be excessively 'highbrow' in catering for middle forms. Nevertheless, the items in this volume make good reading, and will generally stand the test of literary as well as dramatic criticism. Most of them have been found to exercise a strong appeal on boys and girls from twelve to sixteen years of age, and should prove an incentive to further study of the drama. The plays are arranged in order of difficulty, beginning with those which are more suitable for the younger pupils. The one-act play has already justified its existence in the senior school, and no apology is needed for introducing it to younger

pupils, both as an art-form akin to the short story and as a preparation for the full-length play, which at this stage can arouse comparatively little interest. Chosen mainly for reading and acting in the form-room, these specimens will, one hopes, be also found useful for public performance at end-of-term celebrations. Full particulars of the addresses from which permission for such performances must be sought preface each play.

For permission to reprint the plays in this volume grateful acknowledgment is due to the following authors and publishers :

Mr J. J. Bell and Messrs Gowans and Gray, Ltd., for "Wee Macgreegor's Party"; Miss Kathleen Conyngham Greene and Messrs John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd., for "The Princess on the Road," from *The Little Boy Out of the Wood and other Dream Plays*; Miss Louise Saunders and Messrs Charles Scribner's Sons, for "The Knave of Hearts"; Mrs Flebbe (Miss Beulah Marie Dix) and Messrs Henry Holt and Co., for "The Captain of the Gate," from *Allison's Lad and other Martial Interludes*; and to the respective authors or their representatives and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., for "The Dyspeptic Ogre," "The Hordle Poacher," "The 'Ole in the Road," "The Oak Settle," "Shivering Shocks," "Admiral Peters," and "Elegant Edward." The task of selection has been made considerably easier by the invaluable help supplied by my colleague Mr L. G. Brandon, to whom I desire to express my best thanks.

A. E. M. B.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS volume will give you an opportunity of studying and acting plays which are much shorter and more modern than those of Shakespeare. You may have found it difficult to sustain interest in a five-act comedy such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, partly because it is rather complicated in structure, and partly because you cannot read it in a single lesson. Then, again, a full-length play has generally to be 'cut' a great deal before you are allowed to act it on the school stage.

It is possible, of course, to manufacture something short by adapting stories or episodes from Shakespeare, but the result is not nearly so satisfying as a complete one-act play, which has a definite plan and unity of its own.

Now, the short play, like the short story, is a special form of art, and as such requires a special technique on the part of the author. For this reason it should be studied for its own sake, and not merely as an approach to the study of full-length drama. You will find, as a rule, that a one-act play is made to turn upon a single idea or situation, and that in working this out in dramatic form the author has a single end in view.

The essence of drama is *conflict*. This conflict, as you will have often noticed in tales of adventure, may be represented as a struggle against odds. There are certain forces to be combated by the hero, who either succeeds and "lives happily ever after" or fails gloriously and wins our admiration by his indomitable courage. Sometimes the conflict is one of *wills*: characters are pitted against one another, and the best man wins.

You always get some form of conflict in whatever kind of play you study. In the one-act play it develops quickly to a crisis, which either brings down the curtain or at least foreshadows what the end is going to be.

This question of endings is very important. It is natural for us to desire a happy ending to a story, just as we desire problems in real life to be capable of a satisfactory solution. But some conflicts do not admit of this, except by the introduction of strong improbabilities or even impossibilities. In "The Captain of the Gate," for example, the play ends in tragedy. Nevertheless, it is a tragedy that excites our admiration and sympathy, and this is surely better than a pleasant conclusion that would be strained and unnatural because contrary to all that we have been led to expect from the development of the situation.

As a general rule, the author who relies too much on chance and coincidence only weakens his dramatic effect.

In a comedy the conflict may be one of wits. This is particularly noticeable in the one-act comedies which form the greater part of this book. Here we have a struggle against forces which are not impossible to combat, and the better man (or woman) wins. The clever person, however, need not always claim your sympathy. You may feel sorry for the victim, as in "Admiral Peters," but you will hardly want the villains to succeed in obtaining the formula in "Shivering Shocks."

In reading these plays it is well to ask yourselves what events necessary to the development of the plot occurred before the curtain rises. Why does the author begin at a certain point, rather than earlier or later? How does he let you know what important things have happened already? Does he plunge into the middle of a situation? If so, how are you prepared for such a plunge?

In the same way, ask yourselves what happens after the curtain falls, and so supply your own sequel. In some plays

you can go on picturing events quite easily ; in others the situation is rounded off more completely. In any case, inquire whether the ending satisfies you as being the natural result of the forces at work, or whether it is unconvincing because too much is left to chance or coincidence.

The playwright has a purpose ; try to discover it. Is he merely trying to tell an interesting story ? Is he poking fun at a certain type of people or a certain state of affairs ? Or is he chiefly concerned in showing you critical points in the development of character ? It is possible to achieve more than one aim in writing a good play.

To be able to appreciate drama fully, however, you must go farther. As in a story, the subject-matter counts a great deal, but there are other points that deserve consideration. These are more especially connected with character and dialogue. Ask yourselves whether the author relies for effect more on what his characters say or on what they do. Which of them arouse in you the most feeling ? Is this feeling one of sympathy or dislike or amusement or admiration ? Does it increase as the play proceeds ? Sometimes the plot, instead of ' thickening,' seems to ' hang fire.' There is a loss of interest somewhere. You should notice at what points (if at all) this happens. Ask, too, whether your liking for any particular play depends on a special knowledge of the type of people or events portrayed. Is the subject ' topical,' or is it likely to have a permanent appeal ?

Now about acting. Whether you are simply reading a play aloud in the classroom or performing it on the stage, try to enter into the spirit of the thing and *be* the character you are impersonating. Speak as you think he or she would have spoken in the circumstances ; be audible, and do not hurry. Observe where you ought to stand or sit. Do not huddle. Behave as naturally as possible, and forget for the time being that you are schoolboys and schoolgirls.

You will not need elaborate scenery to make your acting a success.

If you are going to set a stage you will find it useful to sketch a simple plan of the scene beforehand and draw up a list of properties. For this purpose consult the directions given at the beginning of each play, the diagram on page 70, and the list of properties on page 202.

Finally, discuss each piece thoroughly before attempting a performance. Valuable suggestions are often secured in this way, and it will be your own fault if after receiving these hints you do not succeed in enjoying yourselves and providing enjoyment for others.

WEE MACGREEGOR'S PARTY

By J. J. Bell

PERSONS

Wee Macgreegor
John Robinson, *Paw*
Lizzie Robinson, *Maw*
Granpaw Purdie
Granmaw Purdie
Aunt Purdie
Uncle Purdie
Willie Thomson
Miss Thomson, *Willie's aunt*
Jessie
Mary
Boys and Girls at Party

Granpaw Purdie wears a short grey beard, John Robinson a moustache, Uncle Purdie side-whiskers. Aunt Purdie's attire should be very 'grand' in comparison with that of Granmaw and Lizzie. The little girls should be in bright prints. Miss Thomson should look as drab and melancholy as possible.

NOTE

"Wee Macgreegor's Party" is adapted from "Wee Macgreegor," a play in three acts, first presented by the Glasgow Repertory Company, under the direction of Alfred Wareing, at the Royalty Theatre, Glasgow, on December 19, 1911; produced by Harold Chapin and the author.

The dialect of the original has been modified.

WEE MACGREEGOR'S PARTY[1]

Scene I

Scene : *The Robinsons' kitchen, about seven o'clock on New Year's Eve. The floor has been cleared. The table at back of stage holds plates of cakes, oranges, sweets, etc. On the right fireplace (range), with fender and hearth-rug, armchairs and ordinary ones. On the left dresser with plate-rack above; chair at side of dresser. Door at back. There are festive decorations, such as sprigs of holly, strings of paper flowers, and a Chinese lantern or two. (Should the satisfactory representation of a kitchen be impossible, that of a parlour, with not too modern furnishings, may be substituted, in which case a cupboard or press, with high shelf, would take the place of the dresser.)*

Before rise of curtain children are heard singing :

"*Bee baw babbity, babbity, babbity,*
Bee baw babbity, babbity bowster brawly."

As they repeat the lines the curtain rises on JESSIE, WILLIE, *and five (or more) other children dancing in a circle,* MACGREEGOR *in centre.* JOHN, LIZZIE, GRANPAW, *and* GRANMAW PURDIE, *with her knitting, look on from fireside.*

CHILDREN [*continuing the song*].

"Kneel down, kiss the crown, kiss the crown. kiss the crown,
Kneel down, kiss the crown, kiss a bonnie wee lassie."

[1] The terms for performing this play can be obtained from Messrs James B. Pinker and Sons, Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, to whom all applications should be made.

[*They pause, laughing, and eye* MACGREEGOR, *who hesitates awkwardly.*

GRANPAW [*encouragingly*]. Come on, Macgreegor!

[MACGREEGOR *approaches* JESSIE, *a girl of thirteen or fourteen, the eldest of the children.*

WILLIE [*jeeringly*]. Haw! He's for the big yin!

[MACGREEGOR *wavers;* JESSIE *kisses him.*

GRANPAW [*clapping his hands*]. That's the style!

JOHN [*behind his hand*]. The modern style—eh!

[*Laughs.*

[*The grown-ups smile and exchange nods.*

MACGREEGOR [*escapes from circle, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. To* WILLIE] What are ye laughin' at?

WILLIE [*breaking circle*]. Haw, haw! ye kissed her!

MACGREEGOR. I didna! If ye say that again ye'll get a bat on the nose!

[*Children stand aside—girls together, boys ditto.*

WILLIE [*squaring up*]. Come on! Hit me!

BOYS. Hit him, Macgreegor!

[*They spar;* WILLIE *gives* MACGREEGOR *a sounding clap. They fight.*

GIRLS. Oh, mercy!

[JOHN *and* LIZZIE *step forward.* GRANPAW *rises.* GRANMAW *throws up her hands in consternation.*

JESSIE [*intervening*]. That's enough! Never heed, Macgreegor. Wullie Thomson, if ye dinna behave I'll cuff yer ears.

WILLIE. He said he didna kiss ye.

JESSIE. It's none o' your business, ye impiddent thing!

WILLIE. I believe ye kissed him first. Haw, haw!

JESSIE. I wouldna kiss *you* if ye was the only man in the world.

WILLIE. I wouldna give ye the chance.

[MACGREEGOR *raises fists.* JESSIE *makes to slap* WILLIE.

JOHN [*interposing*]. Come, come! Remember it's

Hogmanay. Macgreegor, shake hands wi' Wullie. [*Puts* MACGREEGOR'S *and* WILLIE'S *hands together. They shake rather feebly.*] Noo, Wullie, tell Jessie ye're sorry.

JESSIE [*turning away haughtily*]. He can keep his sorry !

LIZZIE [*coming forward, coaxingly*]. Ye've been a great help to me the nicht, lassie. Dinna let Wullie spoil the party. [*Pushes her gently towards* WILLIE.] See, Wullie ! She forgives ye.

WILLIE [*hesitates, then with a gesture of resignation*]. Right-o ! Anything for peace.

[*Moves off to table, and after choosing with much fingering a cake, begins to eat it.*

[JESSIE *and* LIZZIE *whisper together.*

JOHN. What's next on the programme ? Another game—eh ?

MACGREEGOR [*pulling his sleeve, confidentially*]. Paw, I dinna want games wi' kissin' in them.

JOHN [*amused*]. But ye let Jessie kiss ye !

MACGREEGOR. I was thinkin' o' the watch an' chain. [JOHN *checks a guffaw.*] Can we not have a game wantin' the girls ?

JOHN. Oh, that would never do ! Here, Lizzie—Jessie—what's next ?

JESSIE. They can all play at "spin the plate." I've told the wee ones how to play it.

WILLIE [*coming forward, munching*]. Ye didna tell *me.*

JESSIE. If ye watch, ye'll maybe learn. Surely ye're not as stupid as ye look.

[*Meanwhile* MACGREEGOR, *having brought chair in front of dresser, is climbing upon it.*

LIZZIE. What are ye after, laddie ?

MACGREEGOR [*reaching for rack*]. Jist gettin' a plate, Maw. [*Takes down plate.*

LIZZIE [*taking a step towards dresser*]. Ye're not to take that yin !

MACGREEGOR. Whit wey ?

LIZZIE. Put it doon this minute !

[*Plate slips and is smashed on floor.* GRANMAW *and* GRANPAW *jump. Exclamations from children.*

Oh, dear, ma guid plate !

MACGREEGOR. Ye—ye shouldna ha'e told me to put it doon, angry-like.

JOHN. Never heed, wife. It's Hogmanay.

GRANPAW [*joining them*]. He didna mean to break it, Lizzie.

GRANMAW. Dinna greet, dearie.

MACGREEGOR. I'm no' greetin'. [*Rubs eyes with cuff.*

JOHN [*lifting him down*]. I'll soon get ye a plate, ma mannie. [*Climbs on chair and takes plate.*

LIZZIE [*sharply*]. John ! not that yin !

[JOHN *starts, drops it, and jumps down on it. Chorus of "Ohs !" from children.* LIZZIE *makes a gesture of despair and drops on her knees beside the wreckage.*

MACGREEGOR [*running to* LIZZIE]. He didna mean to break it, Maw. Remember it's Hogmanay.

GRANPAW [*going to dresser*]. I think *I'll* try ma luck.

[LIZZIE, *half laughing, half crying, rises, and prevents him.*

[*Patting her shoulder*] Never heed, ma dear. Ye can get plenty plates jist the same, but never another Hogmanay like this. [*Retires to fireside.*

LIZZIE [*takes down plate*]. Here, Jessie. Get yer game started, for the wee ones'll have to gang soon.

[*Joins the grown-ups at fireside.*

JESSIE [*coming to middle of stage and waving children back*]. Now, ye're not to come furrit till yer names are cried. [*To* WILLIE, *who is standing beside a little girl*] Wullie Thomson, if I catch ye pullin' Mary Ann M'Turk's hair again, ye'll not get playin'. Now, are ye all ready ? Mind, ye've got to catch the plate before it falls, or ye've got to pay a forfeit.

A CHILD. What's that ?

JESSIE [*impressively*]. Ye'll maybe learn soon enough ! Now, watch ! [*Spins plate.*] Maggie M'Gilligan !

[*Runs to side.*

[MAGGIE *runs out, catches plate and spins it, calling* MARY ANN M'TURK, *and retires.* MARY ANN *catches plate, spins, and calls* BESSIE WHITE, *who in turn calls* WILLIE THOMSON, *who has been signalling his desire to be called, and retires.* WILLIE *catches plate.*

WILLIE [*spins*]. Macgreegor Robison. [*Retires.*

MACGREEGOR [*in his turn*]. Wullie Thomson.

WILLIE [*in his turn*]. Macgreegor Robison.

MACGREEGOR [*in his turn*]. Wullie——

JESSIE [*rushing forward*]. No, no ! that'll not do ! Ye must cry somebody else. Spin it again.

MACGREEGOR [*spinning*]. Granpaw Purdie.

GRANPAW [*not understanding*]. What is't, ma mannie ?

MACGREEGOR. The plate's spinnin' ! Hurry up ! Stir yer stumps !

GRANPAW [*rising*]. Michty me ! I didna ken ye expected *me* to catch it.

[*Reaches the spot too late, and retires shaking his head.*

MACGREEGOR. Hold on ! I'll give ye another chance. Ye're not extra soople. [*Spins.*] Granpaw Purdie !

GRANPAW [*toddling forward, reaches plate just in time, to the applause of everybody*]. Hech, sirs ! That was touch an' go. 'Deed, aye ! I'm not as soople as I used to be. [*To* MACGREEGOR] I'm gettin' auld, Macgreegor, I'm gettin' auld. [*Bell rings. John leaves room.*

MACGREEGOR. Aye ; ye're gey auld.

GRANPAW [*a trifle indignantly*]. Oh, but I'm not *that* auld. [*Puffs.*] Weel, whose name am I to cry ?

JESSIE. Peter Ross. [*Little boy rushes forward.*

[*To Peter*] Ye're ower smart. Wait till he spins it.

[*Little boy retires amid laughter.*

GRANPAW [*spins*]. Peter Ross ! [*Toddles away.*

[*Peter Ross catches plate as John enters waving a bunch of balloons.*

JOHN. See what Mistress M'Ostrich has sent for the party. She couldna come hersel', for Maister M'Ostrich is that wearied. I thought at first he had been gettin' his hair cut.

[GRANPAW *and* GRANMAW'S *hands go up in admiration.*

CHILDREN. Hurrah !

[*They crowd round* JOHN, *demanding balloons.*

LIZZIE. Mistress M'Ostrich is far ower kind.

GRANMAW. 'Deed, Macgreegor's a great favourite.

[JOHN *distributes balloons to children, who move about swinging them.*

WILLIE [*sidling up to* JESSIE]. I like your colour better nor mine. Will ye change ?

JESSIE [*with a grown-up air*]. Huh ! Ye can ha'e mine an' keep yer own. [*Gives him balloon.*

WILLIE [*confidentially*]. I didna mean what I said about kissin', Jessie. I—I wouldna mind ye kissin' me, if nobody seen me.

JESSIE [*tossing her head*]. I like yer cheek !

[*Moves away.*

PETER ROSS [*holding out plate to Jessie*]. What am I to do wi' the plate ?

[JESSIE *takes plate and puts it on dresser. Small boy,* JOHNNY, *bursts into tears and is surrounded by his comrades.*

JESSIE. What's up, Johnny ?

JOHNNY. N—nobody cried on me to spin the plate !

MACGREEGOR. Never mind, Johnny. Dinna greet. I'll let ye bash ma head wi' yer balloon. Come on ! Bash it !

[*They all bash heads. General mêlée.*

GRANMAW. Oh, I hope they'll not get hurted !

[*Bell rings.*

LIZZIE. Mercy! Who'll that be? [*Holds up hand for silence*]. Whisht, whisht!

[*Children pause and gather in whispering groups.*

MACGREEGOR. Maybe it's another present, Maw. I'll run an' see.

LIZZIE. Na, na. Bide wi' yer friends, dearie. Be a guid laddie, an' ye'll maybe get the prize yet. [*Goes out.*

JOHN [*to* GRANMAW]. 'Deed, it's a fine treat to see them happy—eh, Mistress Purdie?

GRANMAW. It's a' that, John. An' I was terrible pleased to see Macgreegor so kind to wee Johnny. [*To* GRANPAW] Ye'll mind that, Rubbert, when ye're decidin' about the prize.

GRANPAW. I will that, Mary.

JOHN [*anxiously*]. Do ye think he's got a chance for—for the prize, Maister Purdie? I ken he's not been as guid as he might ha'e been——

GRANPAW. Weel, John, ye needna be afraid I'll be severe on yer son. After all, there's none o' us has been as guid as we might ha'e been—even in the last ten days—and so I've decided to give Macgreegor the watch and chain, if he's guid from now till the end o' the year.

JOHN [*happily*]. I think he'll manage that! [*Looks at clock.*] Oh, aye, I'm sure he will.

[WILLIE, *who has stolen behind* MACGREEGOR, *smites him on the head with balloon. General mêlée resumed.* LIZZIE *enters with* AUNT PURDIE. *There is a sudden silence.*

AUNT PURDIE. Good gracious! What a pandemolium! What on earth is transpiring?

[MACGREEGOR *retires to far corner. He is presently joined by* WILLIE.

LIZZIE [*rather nervously*]. Aw, Macgreegor's jist ha'ein' a wee party, seein' it's Hogmanay.

AUNT PURDIE. Oh, indeed! My friend Mrs M'Cluny's children are having a party on the tenth of January. She

is employing a man for to play the pianoforty ! But, of course, in *her* poseetion——

JOHN [*nervously*]. Will ye not take a seat, Mistress Purdie ?

AUNT PURDIE. No, thank you. I called in to tell you not to expect me and Robert till near midnight. He is detained at the Emporium, and I am going now to encounter Mrs M'Cluny at the Repertorey Theatre, and afterwards I am going to have supper with her and the doctor. Mrs M'Cluny's nervous breakdown, I'm thankful to say, has been successfully perverted——

WILLIE [*confidentially to* MACGREEGOR]. Did ye ever try sittin' on a balloon ?

MACGREEGOR. No. What does it do ?

WILLIE. Bursts. I would like fine to see yer aunt sittin' on yin.

MACGREEGOR. So would I—but *after* to-night, Wullie.

WILLIE. Aw, ye're thinkin' about yer watch an' chain. But ye've lost yer chance. Ye canna win the prize. Remember how ye behaved at Mistress M'Ostrich's party !

MACGREEGOR. Maybe I'll get it for—for lettin' Jessie kiss me.

WILLIE. My ! Ye're green ! Ye'll never get it for a rotten thing like that. But I'll tell ye how ye might get it.

MACGREEGOR. How ?

WILLIE. If ye was speakin' polite-like to yer aunt an' [*points*] fetchin' her thon chair to sit on. Ye see, that would please her, an' she would maybe tell yer granpaw to give ye the prize. D'ye see ?

MACGREEGOR [*shaking head*]. I never done anything that pleased her yet.

WILLIE. Weel, there's yer chance.

MACGREEGOR [*after a glance at his aunt*]. She's lookin' awful crabbit.

WILLIE. She canna help that. She'll not look crabbit

if ye're polite to her. Ha'e a shot at it, anyway. I'll come wi' ye.

MACGREEGOR. Come on, then. Hold ma balloon.

[*Hands it over.*

[MACGREEGOR, *followed by* WILLIE, *approaches* AUNT PURDIE *very awkwardly.*

GRANPAW. Here's Macgreegor wantin' to shake hands wi' ye, Sarah.

AUNT PURDIE [*condescendingly*]. So you're having a party, are you? Well, I'm sure I hope you're all behaving yourselves.

MACGREEGOR [*nervously*]. Are ye not for a seat?

[*Puts forward chair.*

GRANMAW. The dear! Sit doon to please him, Sarah.

[JOHN *and* LIZZIE *smile to each other.*

AUNT PURDIE [*surprised*]. Well, upon my word! [*Recovering dignity*] Thank you, Macgreegor. I did not intend for to be seated at this juncture——

[WILLIE *dodging round* MACGREEGOR *puts balloon on chair.*

But—— [*Sits.*] [*Balloon pops.*

Oh! [*Jumps up.*

[WILLIE *slips away, leaving* MACGREEGOR *aghast. General consternation.*

[*The curtain is lowered for one minute.*

SCENE II

SCENE: *The same, about four hours later, near midnight. The stage is less bright than formerly. Chinese lanterns dark.* JOHN, GRANPAW, *and* GRANMAW *are seated at fireside, all very dejected.*

[LIZZIE *enters.*

JOHN. Is he not sleepin' yet? [LIZZIE *shakes her head.*

GRANMAW. Poor lamb!

JOHN. His heart was set on bringin' in the New Year wi' us all. Is—is he greetin' ?

LIZZIE. He wouldna show his face.

GRANPAW. Did he say anything ?

LIZZIE. Na. [*Sits down disconsolately.*] Aweel, he's had his chance an' he's lost it.

JOHN. The temptation was great, wife. When I was a laddie——

LIZZIE. I ken that, John. Ye would have done the same. But ye would have got punished.

JOHN. He jist did it for fun.

LIZZIE. It was terrible impiddent fun. [*Sighs.*] Aweel, if he's punished now, he'll maybe be a better laddie in the year that's comin'.

JOHN. If we was lettin' him bring in the New Year, it might remind him to be a better laddie—eh, Lizzie ?

[LIZZIE *shakes her head.*

GRANMAW. Poor lamb !

GRANPAW. What I want to ken is : What am I to do with this watch an' chain ? [*Takes box from his pocket.*

[*Bell rings.*

LIZZIE [*going to door*]. It'll be Mistress Purdie. I was feared she would be ower offended to come back.

[*Goes out.*

[GRANPAW *hands watch to* JOHN, *who sadly admires it, then passes it to* GRANMAW.

JOHN [*slowly*]. I suppose there *are* young folk in the world that *deserve* prizes for guid conduct.

[LIZZIE *enters with* UNCLE PURDIE, *who carries a seven-pound bottle of boiled sweets.*

UNCLE PURDIE. An' how's a' wi' ye ? Criffens, ye're awful sober-like ! What's up ? [*Looks around.*] Where's Macgreegor ? I thought he was to get bringin' in the New Year.

LIZZIE. Macgreegor's in his bed for misbehavin' himsel', Rubbert.

UNCLE PURDIE. That's bad—for us yins. But he hasna misbehaved so far as I'm concerned, so ye can give him these sweeties wi' his Uncle Purdie's compliments.

[*Sets bottle on table and seats himself.*

JOHN. *Thank* ye, Rubbert!

[*Grabs bottle and makes for door.* LIZZIE *catches him just in time and takes bottle. He comes back crestfallen.*

GRANPAW [*to change the subject*]. Ye've had another busy day, I suppose, Rubbert?

UNCLE PURDIE. Oh, not so bad—canna complain. I thought Sarah would have been here by this time.

GRANMAW. She'll be here before the clock strikes.

LIZZIE [*coming forward with bottle*]. Rubbert, I'm sorry, but I canna give yer sweeties to Macgreegor.

UNCLE PURDIE. They'll not hurt him. They're the best quality. Tell him not to eat more nor a pound a day.

LIZZIE. It's not that, Rubbert. I—I must tell ye what Macgreegor did.

JOHN. Aw, Lizzie, ye needna tell Rubbert——

UNCLE PURDIE. Ye needna tell me unless it's funny.

LIZZIE. Funny! [*Sighs.*] But it's ma duty to tell ye. He got Sarah to—to sit on his balloon. [*A pause.*

UNCLE PURDIE. I'm vexed—for the balloon.

GRANPAW [*slaps his knee*]. Vexed for the balloon! [*To* GRANMAW] Did ye hear him?

[GRANMAW *nods and smiles feebly.*

UNCLE PURDIE [*patting* LIZZIE'S *arm*]. Dinna fash yersel', Lizzie. Sarah'll forget about it. It's Hogmanay, ye ken. I'll put it right wi' Sarah. Leave it to me.

JOHN [*hopefully*]. There, ye see, Lizzie! It's not as serious as ye thought it was. I'll gang an' fetch Macgreegor—— [*Going.*

LIZZIE. Stop!

JOHN [*coming back*]. I ken he canna win the prize now, but——

UNCLE PURDIE. Why can he not win the prize ?

[LIZZIE *turns away and replaces bottle on table.*

GRANMAW. An' what's to be done wi' this ?

[*Holds up watch and chain.*

GRANPAW. Aye ! An' there's another thing we should mind, Lizzie.

LIZZIE [*wearily*]. What ?

GRANPAW. The laddie lost his balloon.

JOHN [*eagerly*]. 'Deed, aye !

LIZZIE [*reproachfully to* GRANPAW]. It's not fair o' ye, Faythcr. Ye ken fine I was anxious for Macgreegor to win the prize—jist as anxious as any o' ye—but right's right, an' wrong's wrong.

UNCLE PURDIE. It's whiles not easy to split the difference. He's but a laddie, an' it's Hogmanay.

LIZZIE [*sadly*]. Ye're all against me, but I'm not goin' to give in. An' Macgreegor understands as weel as me why he canna get the prize. [*Bell rings.* That'll be Sarah. [*Goes out.*

JOHN. I suppose she's right. I suppose she kens best.

[GRANPAW *and* GRANMAW *sigh.*

UNCLE PURDIE. Granted she's right. Granted her Majesty the Queen had sat doon on Macgreegor's balloon. Granted he deserves punishment instead o' a prize. Granted anything ye like—I can still see a way out, if ye *want* to give him the watch an' chain. It's starin' ye in the face !

JOHN, GRANPAW, GRANMAW [*eagerly*]. Eh ? What ?

UNCLE PURDIE. Turn yer prize into a present—and there ye are !

GRANPAW [*slapping knee*]. Man, Rubbert, ye've hit it !

GRANMAW [*clapping hands*]. Is that not nice !

JOHN [*shaking his head and getting up*]. But Lizzie wouldna like that.

[*Enter* LIZZIE *with* WILLIE THOMSON *and* MISS THOMSON. WILLIE *hangs his head.*

MISS THOMSON [*in response to* JOHN'S *offer of seat*]. Na, na, I'm not goin' to wait. I'm vexed for disturbin' ye at this time o' night, but Wullie said he had a pain in his inside——

LIZZIE [*quickly*]. He got nothin' to hurt him here!

MISS THOMSON [*with gesture of assent*]. But after I had given him a dose o' Greegory he said it wasna exactly in his inside. He said it was higher up, an' so I was for puttin' on a poultice, when I discovered it was his conscience. [WILLIE *looks more ashamed than ever.*

ALL. His conscience!

MISS THOMSON. Aye. [*Draws* WILLIE *forward.*] Now, Wullie, tell the truth.

WILLIE [*in choked voice*]. I—I canna.

MISS THOMSON. But ye've got to tell it. Ye promised me.

WILLIE [*with sobs*]. It was me that—that put the balloon below her. Macgreegor had nothin' to do wi' it.

GRANPAW [*holding up hands*]. Weel, weel!

GRANMAW. Poor lamb!

[JOHN *and* LIZZIE *start towards each other.*

MISS THOMSON. Go on, Wullie.

WILLIE. I—I told Macgreegor he would maybe get the prize if he asked her to sit doon, polite-like.

MISS THOMSON. An' is that the whole story?

WILLIE [*nods violently and rubs eyes*]. I—I want to gang hame.

MISS THOMSON [*to* LIZZIE]. So Macgreegor didna tell ye? [LIZZIE *shakes head.*] Wullie said Macgreegor wasna a clipe.[1]

JOHN [*gravely*]. Wullie's right there.

MISS THOMSON. Aweel, we'll gang hame. Wullie can say he's sorry to Macgreegor in the mornin'. Come, laddie. [*They move towards door.*

UNCLE PURDIE [*stepping forward, takes bottle of sweets*

[1] Tell-tale.

from table to WILLIE]. Here, ma lad! Ye've not done half bad. Take that for yer Ne'erday. [*To* JOHN] I'll get Macgreegor another bottle. [*To* WILLIE] They'll not give ye a pain in yer conscience, anyway.

MISS THOMSON. Oh, dear! [*To* WILLIE] An' what do ye say for that?

[WILLIE, *speechless, embraces bottle. Enter* AUNT PURDIE, *closing door behind her.*

AUNT PURDIE. You've left your front door open. For first-footers, I preshume. But what on earth——

GRANPAW [*pointing at clock*]. Ye're jist in time.

AUNT PURDIE. I had such a terrible rush. Mrs M'Cluny was that pressing for me to stay longer. [*Looks round.*] What's ado?

JOHN [*excitedly to* LIZZIE]. I'll fetch Macgreegor. Look at the time!

LIZZIE [*gently*]. Let me fetch him.

[*They are both going when clock begins to strike midnight, slowly.*

GRANPAW [*holding up hand*]. 'Sh!

[*Ere* JOHN *and* LIZZIE *reach the door it opens, and* MACGREEGOR, *barefooted, in long scarlet flannel nightgown, stands on threshold, regarding the company uncertainly.*

JOHN. Macgreegor!
LIZZIE. Dearie!
GRANPAW. Poor lamb!
UNCLE PURDIE. Hurray!
} *They speak all at once and make for* MACGREEGOR.

GRANPAW [*rising and motioning the others to stop*]. Let me gang first. [*To* MACGREEGOR] Come here, ma wee man! [MACGREEGOR *comes slowly forward.* Ye've won the prize. See! [*Gives watch and chain.*

[*All gather round, except* UNCLE *and* AUNT PURDIE. UNCLE PURDIE *is explaining to* AUNT PURDIE.

MACGREEGOR [*examines watch. Puts it to his ear. Appears satisfied*]. Thank ye, Granpaw. Ye're a white man.

[JOHN *checks a guffaw.* GRANPAW *smiles and pats* MACGREEGOR'S *shoulder.*

[*Catching sight of* WILLIE] Here! where did ye get the sweeties?

MISS THOMSON [*solemnly*]. He got them because he had a bad conscience.

MACGREEGOR. I wish I had a——

UNCLE PURDIE [*interposing*]. Yer aunt wants to wish ye a Happy New Year. [*Behind his hand*] She's got ten shillin's for ye.

MACGREEGOR [*going to* AUNT PURDIE]. A Happy New Year, Aunt Purdie.

AUNT PURDIE. The same to you, Macgreegor. I find I have been labouring under a dilution——

[*Presses note into his hand.*

MACGREEGOR. Thank ye kindly. Ye're a white——

GRANPAW [*interposing*]. Come, come; it's time for *Auld Lang Syne.*

[*Under his superintendence they all join hands.* WILLIE, *who refuses to let go his bottle, has to be put at one end of line. They sing part of verse, and are still singing when curtain falls.*

THE PRINCESS ON THE ROAD

By Kathleen Conyngham Greene

PERSONS

The Princess
A Juggler
Labourers, Women, and
Children

THE PRINCESS ON THE ROAD [1]

SCENE : *The street of a country village.*

A wide road leads into the little village. A market cross on three steps stands in the middle of the road. To the left is a pond with some ducks splashing about in it. To the right are a few cottages, gardens in front of them, filled with flowers.

The PRINCESS *enters, walking along the road. She is dusty, the edge of her skirt is torn, and one of her shoes has come off. She wears her hair in a long pig-tail under a cotton handkerchief. She is picking the flowers that hang out of the cottage gardens, and singing as she goes.*

PRINCESS [*singing*].

" For me are your songs and your smiles and your tears,
For me, for ever, for all the years,
I have conquered all your fears,
Now, for ever, for all the years.
For me are you, are you and your smile,
Now, for ever and all the while . . . "

[*She sits down on the steps of the cross with the flowers in her lap.*

PRINCESS. Where am I now ? I must be twelve miles from home. And no one has known me ! How I will laugh at Florimund ! This is life ! If I can do this once

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd., Vigo Street, London, W.1.

in every month I shall not mind the sentries and the banquets. Our good Florimund will find me an angel when I return. How he will laugh when he sees my dust and my rags! Can I get a coach from here, I wonder, to take me home? [*She twists her red rose round and round between her fingers.*] Where are all the people? This is like a village of the dead. I am thirsty. I will have a glass of milk, and then one of these good villagers shall drive me home. Where are they all? [*She rests her two hands on the step and looks round.*] No one in sight. Hoh la la! [*She calls loudly.*]

[*A little child appears out of one of the cottages and looks at her over the gate.*

PRINCESS [*beckoning with her fingers*]. Come here, little one! Where are all the people?

CHILD [*with his finger in his mouth*]. In th' fields. Harvesting!

PRINCESS. Harvest? Oh, this is very rural! Tell me has your mother any milk?

CHILD. Aye.

PRINCESS. Get me a cup of milk, will you not? I am very thirsty.

CHILD [*pointing over his shoulder towards the cottage*]. In there.

PRINCESS [*coming down the steps*]. Oh, it is in there, is it? And I must go and get it for myself? This is a great adventure! And what a tale for Florimund!

[*She goes across the road, through the garden, and disappears into the cottage. In a few minutes she comes out, carrying a jug and a cup, a loaf of bread and a knife.*

PRINCESS. Now, little one, we will eat here on the steps and see when your father and mother come home. Will you not have a bit of this good white bread?

CHILD [*standing up straight at the foot of the cross with his hands behind his back*]. No. 'Tis the Sunday loaf.

PRINCESS. But eat now. There will be some for Sunday as well.

CHILD. Nay. Mother'll beat me.

[*He runs back into the cottage. The* PRINCESS *crumbles the remains of the bread between her fingers and throws it on to the road for the ducks.*

PRINCESS [*singing*].

" And mine are your smiles and your songs and your tears,
Now, for ever, for all the years. . . ."

[*There is a sound of many voices coming along the road. The* PRINCESS *pulls down the torn hem of her skirt and pushes back the hair from her face.*

PRINCESS [*to herself*]. Here are the harvesters ! Now to get a cart and to drive home. I could not walk another three steps ! How Florimund will laugh ! Indeed, I am quite like a girl of the people !

[*She sticks out her dusty, shoeless foot and looks at it. The villagers enter, straggling one by one. Men and women with rakes and scythes, one woman carrying a heavy basket of apples. The first woman stops at the foot of the cross and stands with arms akimbo, looking up at the* PRINCESS.

FIRST WOMAN. And who is this ?

PRINCESS [*nodding and smiling*]. Good evening, good dame.

FIRST WOMAN. Oh ! good evening !

[*The others gather up, talking and laughing, and put down their burdens round the steps of the cross.*

PRINCESS. Will one of you have the goodness to harness a cart for me ? I wish to return to the town.

[*There is a chorus of laughter.*

FIRST MAN. Eh ! No doubt !

[*He turns away and spits on to the road.*

PRINCESS [*standing up*]. Will you have the goodness to do it for me now ? I must return at once to the town.

SECOND WOMAN [*sitting down on the lowest step and tying her shoe*]. She's cracked, no doubt, poor girl !

PRINCESS. I have asked you twice. Did you hear me ?

SECOND MAN. Aye ! Ask again and then move on. We can't have vagabonds here.

PRINCESS [*sitting down and laughing helplessly*]. Oh, Florimund ! How he will laugh !

THIRD WOMAN [*very shrill-voiced, calling out from the crowd*]. What is that ? Is it my jug there on the step ? Hold it up !

PRINCESS [*holding up the jug*]. Is it yours ? I took it from the cottage there on the right.

[*She points towards the cottage.*

THIRD WOMAN. She took it ! She took it ! She tells me so ! [*She pushes past the other people on to the steps.*] And my knife ! And my cup ! And plate !

[*Her voice gets shriller and shriller. The little child squeezes through the bystanders and comes up to her.*

CHILD. Mother ! She took the loaf for Sunday ! She gave it to the ducks, but I wouldn't eat it !

THIRD WOMAN. And my Sunday loaf !

[*She flings her hands up over her head.*

SECOND MAN [*coming up the steps*]. Did 'e do it ? Did 'e take the things ?

PRINCESS [*cowering back against the stem of the cross*]. Yes ! I took them.

THIRD WOMAN. Oh, the brazen-faced hussy ! My jug and my loaf ! What will we have for Sunday ?

PRINCESS. I'm sorry. I did. . . .

THIRD WOMAN. Sorry. . . . Sorry. . . . So will you be ! And how do we know what else may not have gone ?

FIRST WOMAN. That rose there ! That will be from my garden !

FOURTH WOMAN. My flowers too ! She's robbed more than th' gardens, we'll see !

THIRD WOMAN. Search her ! Search her !

[*She seizes the* PRINCESS *by the shoulders and pulls at the front of her dress. The* PRINCESS *screams and pushes her off with her hands.*

PRINCESS. Oh ! leave me ! leave me ! I'll tell you . . . I'll tell you who I am !

FIRST WOMAN. 'Tis easy to see what you are ! The beauty !

FIRST MAN. Where is the child ? He'll say. [*To the child*] Answer me now ! Did she go into the cottage ?

CHILD. Aye. She did.

THIRD WOMAN [*who has been feeling over the* PRINCESS]. There's nothing here upon her.

FIRST WOMAN [*disconsolately*]. Nothing ?

THIRD WOMAN [*triumphantly*]. Aye, and that shows to me that there must be another one in it ! She has passed things to another who has gone off with them ! [*She seizes the* PRINCESS *by the shoulder.*] Where are they ? The things 'e took ?

PRINCESS [*trembling*]. I took nothing.

THIRD WOMAN. Why did 'e go there into my house ?

PRINCESS. I only took the bread and . . .

THIRD WOMAN. . . . and . . . and . . . Do 'e all hear that ?

SECOND MAN. Let me come. I'll make her talk !

[*He comes up the steps and tries to grasp her arm.*

PRINCESS [*screaming*]. No ! No ! No ! I tell you I am the Princess ! Oh ! can't you believe what I say ?

SEVERAL VOICES [*scornfully*]. The Princess ! The Princess !

THIRD MAN. Get her to the pond. She'll tell us what she's taken !

SEVERAL. Aye! The pond!

PRINCESS [*putting her hands over her eyes*]. No! No! No! I have taken nothing! Only the bread; I was hungry! [*The* THIRD MAN *seizes her hand.*] Oh! don't touch me! Can't you see? Don't you know? I am the Princess.

THIRD WOMAN [*pointing to* PRINCESS'S *foot*]. Without'n a shoe! And in rags! The Princess!

[*Shrieks of laughter from the crowd.*

PRINCESS. Won't you understand? It was for an adventure! Because my husband . . . ! Oh! Florimund!

[*The* FIRST WOMAN *has come round from behind and seized her by the shoulders.*

FIRST WOMAN. Now up and stand, my hussy, and we'll see what cold water'll make 'e say!

SECOND MAN [*from the background*]. Whip her out of the place, the vagabond!

SEVERAL. Have some fun with her first!

[*The* PRINCESS *flings her arms round the cross and screams.*

THIRD WOMAN. Heat an iron at the forge! That'll make her speak! Like as not she took that hen and chickens of mine I lost last week!

SEVERAL. No! The water! Fetch her to the pond!

PRINCESS [*turning round with her hands clasped behind her round the cross*]. I am the Princess! Oh! can't you believe me? I am the Princess!

[*The* JUGGLER *has come up the road and is standing on the outskirts of the crowd. He is richly dressed and is followed by a boy with a basket.*

JUGGLER. Hello! Hello! What have we here?

SEVERAL MEN [*turning round*]. Oh! A gentleman!

[*The* FIRST MAN *takes off his cap. The* JUGGLER *salutes briskly.*

PRINCESS [*shrilly*]. It is the man who came to the

Palace! You remember me! Don't you remember me?

JUGGLER. What? [*He runs up the steps, pushing aside the people. The* PRINCESS *holds out her hand. He looks at her in amazement, then takes her hand and kisses it.*] What? Your Highness? Is it . . . ? What is all this?

PRINCESS [*sobbing*]. Oh! I wanted an adventure. I left them all and borrowed a peasant girl's clothes. I came along the road, picking flowers . . . all alone . . . so free. . . . Then these set upon me and said I had stolen their things. I only took a little milk and bread and flowers. And they won't know who I am.

[*The people have been watching from the foot of the steps.*

THIRD WOMAN [*loudly*]. Now, young sir! Let her be! We must finish our fun with her!

SECOND MAN. Whip her out of the place, the vagabond!

JUGGLER [*turning round and speaking very clearly*]. Good people, you do not know what you are doing! This is her Highness the Princess, the newly married consort of our illustrious Prince Florimund.

A VOICE. Princess! Ha! Ha!

ANOTHER VOICE. Why is she dressed up so then?

JUGGLER. For her own pleasure the Princess put on the simple clothes of a village girl . . .

A VOICE. What! Those'n rags?

JUGGLER. . . . and came for a walk into the country.

THIRD WOMAN [*shrilly*]. 'Tis likely, for a princess! Young man, give her here! We'll duck her!

SECOND MAN. A vagabond, a vagabond! Whip her out of the place!

JUGGLER. I tell you I myself had the honour of giving a performance before her Highness last week. Several performances. Her Highness's grace and condescension even went so far that she deigned . . .

FIRST WOMAN. Her Highness! Grace! Let be, young

man! Princesses behave as princesses should. This is but a common vagabond!

SECOND MAN. And whip her out of the place!

[*The woman comes up the steps. The* SECOND MAN *is cracking a cart-whip in the background.*

JUGGLER. I tell you, you are wrong! This is a gracious lady!

PRINCESS. Oh! tell them if they will let me go that my husband will give them anything they ask for!

JUGGLER. One and all they deserve the gallows!

PRINCESS. Do not make them more angry! Good people, if you will believe me, if you will let me just go quietly home, you may have anything you can ask for! Gold . . . and silver . . . [*she looks round*] . . . ducks, a hundred jugs and plates, a hundred loaves of bread. . . . I swear that I can give you this!

JUGGLER. And I swear to you that she can do all she says.

FIRST WOMAN. All very well, but how'll we know? Show us something that'll prove it. What can 'e do? Princess, eh?

JUGGLER [*low and eagerly*]. What can your Highness do? Quick! all may depend on this!

PRINCESS [*putting her hand up to her face*]. What can I do? What can I do?

[*The* SECOND MAN *cracks his whip loudly, close to her ear. Some one throws a stone into the pond with a loud splash. There is a shrill laugh.*

A VOICE. Splash her in!

JUGGLER [*to the crowd*]. Her Highness can sing. No one can mistake the voice of a princess!

FIRST MAN. Sing, can 'e? Let her sing to us, then, princess or no princess.

PRINCESS [*looking round*]. Have you a guitar? A viol?

SECOND WOMAN. No, my dear.

[*There is a burst of laughter. The* SECOND MAN *is*

chasing the screaming children about the road with his whip. The PRINCESS *clasps her hands and sings quaveringly.*

" For me are your smiles and your songs and your tears,
Mine for ever, for all the years. . . ."

[*There is another burst of laughter.*

A VOICE. Singing ! Eh ? Can 'e sing ? " For me are your tears ! " So they will be when 'e's in the pond !

THIRD MAN [*mimicking her in a brassy falsetto*].

" Fer me are your smiles, fer me are your tears ! "

[*Loud laughter from all sides.*

JUGGLER. Oh ! Your Highness, what can you do ?

PRINCESS. I can dance ! Good people, I can dance for you !

SECOND MAN. Dance down the street at the whip end, the vagabond !

THIRD MAN. Aye ! Let 'e dance ! Let us see how a princess can dance !

[*The* PRINCESS *comes down from the steps and stands in the dust in the middle of the ring of villagers. She holds her torn skirts in her hand and looks round vaguely.*

PRINCESS. The music ? Will you play ?

FIRST MAN. The music ? Don't 'e hear it ?

JUGGLER [*breathing very fast*]. Your Highness, there is no music. [*The* PRINCESS *makes the first steps of a minuet.*

FIRST WOMAN. Dancing ! That's dancing ! As princesses dance ! [*She laughs loudly.*

BET. Oh ! lor !

FIRST WOMAN [*pushing her forward*]. Here, Bet, can 'e dance like that ?

BET [*giggling*]. Oh ! lor ! [*She puts her hands on her hips and kicks about her legs.*] Dancing ! Oh ! lor !

SECOND MAN [*from the outskirts of the crowd*]. Give her here! I'll make her dance!

[*The* PRINCESS *runs up the steps and crouches down against the cross. The* JUGGLER *stands over her, glaring at the people.*

FIRST WOMAN [*loudly and authoritatively*]. Now here, then, young man! Give us your princess! We have given her a chance to show herself! Could she ha' danced or could she ha' sung we'd ha' believed she were more'n a vagabond. . . .

THIRD WOMAN [*shrilly*]. Thieving hussy!

FIRST WOMAN. . . . But she can do nothing. So we'll have a bit of fun with her and send her out on the road.

SECOND MAN. Whip her out of the place!

BET [*giggling*]. Dance again! Let 'e dance again!

THIRD MAN [*squeezing* BET *round the waist*]. Here's one as can dance. [BET *struggles and shrieks ecstatically.*

THIRD WOMAN. Come on now!

[*She grasps the* PRINCESS'S *arm.*

JUGGLER [*pushing himself between*]. I tell you, you are mad fools! You will have your houses burnt above your heads! Do you think the Prince will pardon such treatment as this? And if you kill her, as you will surely kill her, a delicate woman! . . . do you think the Prince will be content till he has seen you all, men, women, and children, dead before his eyes? Can't you see that this is not a common road woman?

[*Some people look at one another nervously.*

FIRST MAN. Let 'e show us something! What can 'e do? We won't let vagabonds pass!

[*The* JUGGLER *looks round in despair. He sees his boy holding the basket on the outskirts of the crowd, and signals to him wildly. Then he turns to the* PRINCESS.

JUGGLER. Does your Highness remember? Could your

Highness do the trick with the balls that you were so gracious as to learn from me?

PRINCESS. Throwing the balls? Oh, yes! I used to play with my sisters.

JUGGLER. Your Highness would deign?

PRINCESS. I could do it. I think I could do it.

[*She pushes up the sleeve from her arm.*

JUGGLER [*to the crowd, taking a deep breath*]. You ask to see some sign that this is a princess, a lady from the highest places in the land? Well . . . since you must see . . . ! Which of you can throw a ball into the air and catch it?

BET [*from the foreground, where she is peering impertinently at the* PRINCESS]. I could.

JUGGLER. Which of you can throw two balls and catch them?

WOMAN [*pushing forward a small boy*]. Johnny here, he can.

JUGGLER. Which of you could throw three balls, and four and five and keep them flying above the ground? Which of you?

[*The* JUGGLER'S *boy pushes up to the steps with his gaily decorated basket. The* JUGGLER *fumbles with the strings.*

PRINCESS [*eagerly*]. No. No. Give me that basket of apples!

[*The people are all listening and watching. The* SECOND WOMAN *drags up the basket of apples. The* PRINCESS *stoops down and takes three apples into her lap. She throws them up and catches them again, keeping them flying in the air at once.*

FIRST MAN. See her now? Could 'e do that, Bet? Could 'e, Johnny?

JOHNNY [*watching open-mouthed*]. Nay!

[*The* PRINCESS *takes another apple and keeps four flying at once.*

FIRST WOMAN. Do 'e see ? Do 'e see ?

SECOND WOMAN. Look at her hands ! She never did no scrubbing !

[*The* JUGGLER *leans against the cross with folded arms, looking at the ground. The* PRINCESS *takes a fifth apple. A loud murmur of admiration comes from the crowd.*

PRINCESS [*singing, keeping the apples spinning from hand to hand*].

" For me are your songs and your smiles and your tears,
Mine for ever, through all the years ;
Give me your hand, forget your fears. . . ."

FIRST MAN. Could 'e do that ? Could 'e ?

[*The people press all forward, watching.*

FIRST WOMAN. Do 'e see the lace at her elbow ? Under the ragged sleeve ?

SECOND MAN [*holding his breath*]. Will she drop it now . . . ? No !

PRINCESS [*singing*].

" I have conquered all your fears,
For ever, for ever, for all the years,
And mine for ever shall be your smile. . . ."

Throw me another apple !

FIRST WOMAN [*in awe*]. What ! Another apple !

THIRD WOMAN. Give it now !

[*A man comes forward sheepishly with an apple.*

PRINCESS [*imperiously*]. Throw it ! Throw it !

[*She catches it and spins it with the others. The six apples jump up and down round her like the weaving of a pattern. A cry of admiration comes from the crowd.*

PRINCESS [*singing*].

" Mine for ever, for all the years."

[*She spins one apple at* JOHNNY, *who is gazing with open mouth.*] For you !

[*She spins another at* BET, *who drops it and gropes on her knees after it in the dust. The third flies up in the air. The* JUGGLER *gives a start, spreads out his two palms and catches it. The* PRINCESS *stands up, three apples leaping up and down from her hands. She looks round at the crowd of faces.*

PRINCESS. Whoever catches this may lend me a cart. [*She spins one apple into the crowd.*] Whoever catches this may lend me a horse. [*She throws a second.*] And whoever this . . . [*she tosses it up and down*] . . . may drive me back to the town.

[*She throws the last apple up into the air. There is a scramble.*

SEVERAL VOICES. I caught it. . . . I did. . . . I.

[*The* PRINCESS *sinks down on the step. A battered country cart is dragged to the front of the cross. Some one brings out an old shaggy-legged horse. The* THIRD MAN *climbs on to the front of the cart, the* SECOND MAN *hands him the whip, which he waves with a beautiful flourish. The* JUGGLER *lifts the* PRINCESS'S *hand to his lips.*

JUGGLER. Your Highness's carriage waits !

CURTAIN

THE DYSPEPTIC OGRE

A MODERNIZED FAIRY PLAY

By Percival Wilde

CHARACTERS

The Ogre
The Ogre's Cook
Frances
The Monday Dinner
The Tuesday Dinner
The Wednesday Dinner
The Thursday Dinner
The Friday Dinner
The Saturday Dinner
The Sunday Dinner
The Principal Boy Scout
The other Boy Scouts
The Jester

THE DYSPEPTIC OGRE[1]

Before the curtains part a JESTER, *with cap and bells and stick, enters at one side, comes to the centre of the stage, and bows deeply to the audience.*

THE JESTER. Ladies and gentlemen: this is a fairy play; a fairy play all about an Ogre who lived in a Castle in the Calabrian Mountains (wherever they may be) in the Steenth Century. The Steenth Century, by the way, began ever so many years ago, and by a most remarkable coincidence ended exactly one hundred years later. Of course the Ogre is dead now; he died of acute indigestion one day after eating a particularly hearty lunch; but he was very much alive then! Indeed he was!

Now, an Ogre is a person who dines ex-clu-sive-ly on human flesh (which is a very bad habit); but this Ogre is not like other Ogres; not at all. Indeed, he might be called an Ogre because nothing but human flesh O-grees with him.

[*The curtains part an inch or two, and a little girl taps the* JESTER *on the back.*

[*To the audience*] Excuse me a minute. [*He converses with the little girl in earnest dumb-show. She disappears, and he turns to the audience.*] She says I mustn't tell you too much about our play, because if I did I might spoil it all. But I must say this [*with great precaution, that the actors behind the curtains shall not overhear him, he whispers to the audience*]. Don't be afraid that the Ogre's going to eat *her*!

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

By no means ! Of course, I know that it looks as if that were going to happen. But don't let it upset you. [*Very confidentially*] Appearances are deceptive.

[*The curtains part once more, and the little girl remonstrates with the* JESTER *again.*

She says I mustn't say another word. They're all ready to begin. [*He goes solemnly to the side of the stage, bows to the audience and raps three times. The curtains part, disclosing a large room with a door at the back and a large, heavily barred door at the side. Seats himself comfortably.*] This is the larder in the Ogre's Castle, a very unpleasant Castle, with a Moat and a Drawbridge and a Portcullis and Sentries, and no hot and cold running water, and very old-fashioned plumbing. But then the Ogre doesn't bathe very often, and if he did, he would find the Moat much roomier than any bath-tub (though not nearly so private) ; but the plumbing has nothing to do with this play, so it doesn't really matter.

This is the Ogre's larder [*in answer to an imaginary question from the audience he spells out the word*]—l-a-r-d-e-r —and this is inside the Ogre's Castle, and all that we can see of the outside is a wee patch of sky through the narrow, barred windows high up in the thick stone walls.

You wonder where that big door leads. Well [*and he whispers to the audience again*], in those good old days they didn't have refrigerators, and the Ogre had to keep his dinner alive until he was ready to eat it ; and there is a whole collection of dinners behind that door waiting for the Ogre to get up an appetite.

[*A telephone rings on a kitchen table.*

Of course, some people will say there were no telephones in the Steenth Century, when all of this happens ; but I read a book which was written then, and it doesn't say that they didn't have telephones, and if the man who wrote that book didn't know, I'd like to know who does !

[*The* OGRE'S COOK, *who is fat, and sleepy, and who*

has been dozing at the big table, wakes up and goes to the telephone.

This is the Ogre's Cook. You will learn to know her much better later on.

THE COOK [*who, by the way, is a lady-cook*]. Hello! Hello! [*She jiggles the lever up and down.*] What? . . . Ye rang me. [*She hangs up the telephone in disgust.*] "Sorry you've been troubled!"

[*The* OGRE *enters. He is a little bent gentleman, with thick spectacles, who hobbles around with the aid of a cane.*

THE JESTER. This is the Ogre. [*The* OGRE, *proceeding into the room, stops to bow to the* JESTER, *who returns his bow.*] He is a very polite Ogre.

THE OGRE [*bows to the* JESTER *again, and goes to the* COOK]. Where are my pills?

THE COOK [*producing a bottle containing enormous red and green pills*]. There they are, sorr. [*The* OGRE *empties out two or three.*] Wait a minute; I'll be afther gettin' ye a sup of wather! [*She brings him water.*] There!

THE OGRE [*swallowing—or appearing to swallow—several pills*]. My stomach feels so bad—so bad this morning!

THE JESTER [*to the audience*]. So would yours if you ate what he eats!

THE OGRE [*to the* COOK]. I thought I heard the telephone ring.

THE COOK. Ye did, sorr.

THE JESTER. I forgot to say that the Cook is Irish. They had Irish cooks in the Steenth Century, just as they will have Irish cooks in the Steenty-Steenth.

THE OGRE [*to the* COOK]. Well, what did they want?

THE COOK. 'Twas a wrong number, sorr. Bad 'cess on 'em!

THE JESTER [*with a wealth of expression*]. "Bad 'cess" is something like measles—only more unpleasant.

[*The telephone rings again. The* OGRE *takes it up*

THE OGRE. Hello! Yes. . . . Yes. . . . [*Angrily*] YES! [*With a sudden change of manner, very cordially*] Oh, it's the butcher!

THE COOK. The butcher!

THE OGRE. Do we need any meat?

THE COOK [*counting on her fingers*]. I'm afraid we do, sorr.

THE JESTER. What a whopper! Just wait and see what they've got behind that door!

THE OGRE [*to the telephone*]. Yes; we need some meat. What have you got that's nice this morning? . . . [*To the* COOK] He says he's got a nice fresh politician. Ugh!

THE COOK [*earnestly*]. Politicians? Don't be afther thryin' thim again, sorr. Th' last wan was so tough 'twas all I could do to make broth out of him!

THE OGRE. And I couldn't keep even that on my stomach! [*He turns to the telephone.*] No; no politicians this morning. What else have you got? . . . [*With great pleasure*] He's got a poet!

[*The* JESTER *breaks into uproarious laughter and applause, rocking back and forth overcome with mirth at something humorous which the audience has apparently overlooked. The* OGRE *and the* COOK *stop the action of the play to bow appreciatively to the* JESTER, *who continues to laugh. When he finally quiets down the play proceeds again.*

THE COOK. What does he say he has?

THE OGRE. He says he's got a poet!

THE COOK [*reproachfully*]. Now! Now!

THE OGRE. I love poetry! And I love poets! Particularly fried with butter and parsley!

THE COOK. Do ye want to kill yourself entoirely? Ye had a nightmare after ye et the last. Did ye or did ye not? Well?

THE OGRE [*sadly and reluctantly*]. I did.

THE COOK [*with finality*]. No more poets, if ye know what's best for ye !

THE OGRE [*to the telephone, sorrowfully*]. No ; no poets to-day. . . . [*He turns to the* COOK *again.*] He says he's got some nice little girls.

THE COOK. How much ?

THE OGRE. How much ? . . . Half a crown a pound ? My, my, you're dear !

THE COOK. 'Tis the only thing ye can digest.

THE OGRE. He says they'll do for boiling.

THE COOK. Take 'em.

THE OGRE. I'd prefer something else for a change.

THE COOK. An' upset your stomach again ? Take 'em, or it'll be th' worse for ye !

THE OGRE [*to the telephone*]. Can you pick out one ? Just one ? . . . Nice ? . . . Fat ? . . . Juicy ? . . . [*He turns to the* COOK.] I think I ought to go to the market and pick her out myself.

THE COOK. Let me talk to him ! [*She takes up the telephone.*] Listen, me bould shpalpeen !

THE JESTER. " Shpalpeen " is an Irish word, and I don't know exactly what it means.

THE COOK. Send her up ; yis, send her up ! An' if she isn't better than th' last, 'tis meself will make ye eat her ! Yis ! Ye'll have to eat her, even if she sticks on your chest ! So there ! [*She hangs up the receiver, and turns to the* OGRE.] When I've finished cookin' her, when I've got her stuffed with sage and chestnuts, an' roasted to a turn, with a sweet sauce with almonds and rice, my, won't she make your mouth wather !

THE OGRE [*disconsolately*]. I suppose so ; I suppose so.

THE COOK. Ye talk as if ye didn't like th' idea.

THE OGRE. I don't. I don't like to eat children. I'd prefer mutton ; or beef.

THE COOK. Ye can't digest thim ; an' if ye could, ye wouldn't be an Ogre.

THE OGRE. I don't want to be an Ogre.

THE COOK [*with finality*]. Ye've got to be an Ogre!

THE JESTER [*turning to the audience apprehensively*]. He's got to be an Ogre, or there won't be any play!

THE COOK [*proceeding to the barred door*]. Look what's waiting for ye! Your Monday dinner!

[*She opens the door, and a little girl enters.*

THE OGRE [*peering around*]. Where is it? Where is it?

THE COOK. Right before your eyes!

THE JESTER. He's so blind he can hardly see her.

THE OGRE [*finally discerning the little girl, and rising politely*]. How do you do, dinner?

THE MONDAY DINNER [*frightened, but curtsying*]. Very well, thank you, sir.

THE COOK [*introducing other little girls as they enter*]. Your Tuesday dinner. Your Wednesday dinner. Your Thursday dinner. Your Friday dinner. Your Saturday dinner. Your Sunday dinner.

THE OGRE. How do you do, food?

THE DINNERS. Very well, thank you, sir.

THE OGRE. Are you getting enough to eat?

THE MONDAY DINNER. Oh, yes, sir! Plenty, sir.

THE OGRE [*turning to the* COOK]. Didn't one of them have a cold?

THE COOK [*indicating the* WEDNESDAY DINNER]. 'Twas this wan.

THE OGRE [*hobbling closer*]. How do you feel, my dear? Is your cold better?

THE WEDNESDAY DINNER. Buch bedder! Thagk you, sir.

THE OGRE [*tragically*]. "Buch bedder! Thagk you, sir!" She wants to poison me!

THE COOK. Wednesday dinner, change place with Sunday dinner! There! [*The two girls indicated change places.*] Give yourself th' benefit of th' doubt! Never take a chanst, says I!

THE OGRE [*cheering up a little as he surveys his collection*].

I don't see why we want more meat when we have all of this.

THE COOK. Ye don't want to eat thim till they're fattened up, do ye ?

THE OGRE. No ; I suppose not.

THE COOK. Give 'em toime, says I ; give 'em toime !

THE OGRE [*going to the* MONDAY DINNER]. Let me feel your muscle, my dear. [*The little girl doubles her arm. The* OGRE *feels her muscle. With great pleasure*] Is that the best you can do ?

THE MONDAY DINNER. Yes, sir.

THE OGRE. Try hard. Now !

THE MONDAY DINNER. I'm trying my hardest.

THE OGRE. And that's your very best ?

THE MONDAY DINNER. Yes, sir.

THE OGRE [*excitedly*]. Sweet child !

[*He attempts to take a bite out of her biceps.*

THE COOK [*stopping him energetically*]. Not raw ! Not raw !

THE OGRE [*reluctantly*]. I suppose not. But isn't she just too sweet !

THE COOK. She'll be much swater fricasseed with Maryland sauce.

[*The* JESTER, *as before, breaks into hilarious laughter. All the performers are pleased, and bow to him.*

THE JESTER. Maryland sauce ! In the Steenth Century ! Maryland sauce !

[*The actors show that they are offended ; the* JESTER *subsides suddenly ; the play continues.*

THE OGRE [*proceeding to the* THURSDAY DINNER]. And you, my dear ; let me feel your muscle. [*He feels ; then to the* COOK] She's not very tender.

THE COOK. She's only been here a week, sorr.

THE OGRE. Put her to bed ; no exercise ; double rations ; lots of candy and cream.

THE COOK. Yis, sorr.

THE OGRE. Even then we may have to use her for soup stock. [*He shakes his finger at her.*] I'm disappointed in you, little girl! Disappointed! [*He looks around piteously.*] I'm an old man, and I haven't a good digestion, and what you would do to me! Oh, what you would do to me! [*He collapses into a chair.*] Get me my pills. [*The* COOK *brings them. He swallows one. Points to the* THURSDAY DINNER.] Take her away! Take them all away! The thought of them is enough to ruin my appetite!

THE COOK [*to the* DINNERS]. Come on, there's a dear. Come on. Come on.

[*She urges them back where they came from.*

THE OGRE. Get them out of my sight! Away with them! [*Feebly*] This business of being an Ogre isn't what it's cracked up to be!

THE JESTER [*shaking his head sympathetically*]. Of course, he didn't use those words in the Steenth Century; but that's exactly how he felt. [*Addressing the* OGRE] Isn't that true? [*The* OGRE *nods sadly.*

THE COOK [*having fastened the great door, returns to the* OGRE, *and begins temptingly*]. With a bit of spice, and a dash of lemon, and a little mushroom flavouring . . .

THE OGRE [*interrupting*]. Ugh!

THE COOK. An' a thick yellow sauce, an' a touch of curry . . .

THE OGRE. Ugh! Ugh!

THE COOK. An' I'll bake some of 'em into a pie, browned on th' top, an' crisp at th' edges . . .

THE OGRE. Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!

THE JESTER. He's thinking of the pies his mother used to make. [*A trumpet-call outside.*

THE COOK. The butcher!

THE OGRE [*brightening a little*]. The new girl!

THE COOK. I'll bring her in!

[*The trumpet sounds a second time.*

Take yer toime! Take yer toime! I'm coming!

[*She goes out.*

THE JESTER. That was the way the butcher announced he was calling in the Steenth Century. In those good old days there was style to keeping house.

[*The trumpet blows a third time; a long and complicated call.*

[*After having listened attentively*] In the language of the Steenth Century that means "I've put her on the dumb-waiter. Hoist."

[*The* OGRE, *who has been sitting at the table disconsolately, rises laboriously, produces a pocket-mirror and a comb, and proceeds to spruce himself up. The* JESTER, *sighing*:

The good old days! Ah, the good old days! To-day what housewife would powder her nose to receive a lamb chop?

[*The door at the rear flies open, the* OGRE *faces about ceremoniously, and the little girl who interrupted the* JESTER *before the curtains parted stands on the threshold.*

THE OGRE. Hello!

FRANCES. Hello!

THE OGRE [*bowing rheumatically*]. Allow me to welcome you to my castle.

FRANCES [*curtsying*]. Thank you.

THE OGRE. Won't you walk in?

FRANCES. Yes. [*She looks around.*] What a queer room this is! Oh, but it's not polite to criticize.

THE OGRE. It is anything but polite. I think it is a very nice room.

FRANCES. Do you? Well, then, I agree with you.

THE OGRE [*unable to believe his ears*]. What did you say? What did you say?

FRANCES. I said, "I agree with you."

THE OGRE [*joyfully*]. You agree with me! What

beautiful words! You agree with me! How I hope you mean it!

FRANCES. Of course I mean it.

THE OGRE [*dubiously*]. I'll know more about that a little later.

THE JESTER. He means he'll have inside information.

THE OGRE [*shaking his head sadly*]. It's happened to me so often before: so often! I've met little girls—oh, the dearest children—and they said they'd agree with me, and I thought they meant it. But they didn't. [*He rubs his stomach pathetically.*] They disagreed with me most violently. Deceitful little wretches!

FRANCES. I hope you won't find me deceitful.

THE OGRE. I hope I won't, my dear. When I think of what I did for some of those children it almost destroys my faith in human nature! I treated them like royalty; I fed them on the fat of the land; I thought nothing was too good for them! And how did they repay me? They kept me awake at night!

[*He hobbles to the table and takes a pill.*

FRANCES [*timidly*]. I don't know if I ought to talk to you.

THE OGRE. And why not, pray?

FRANCES. We haven't been introduced.

THE OGRE [*smiling*]. Well, that can be arranged. What is your name?

FRANCES. My name is Frances.

THE OGRE. Pleased to meet you. Now, is everything all right?

FRANCES. What is your name?

THE OGRE [*sighing*]. It's so long since anybody has called me by my name that I've almost forgotten it. I'm just the Ogre. But when I was a little fellow, just a shaver——

THE JESTER [*interrupting*]. An Ogrette, so to speak.

THE OGRE. My mother used to call me Freddy.

FRANCES. *I* can't very well call you Freddy, can I!

THE OGRE. No; but you can think of me as Freddy. You will, sometimes; won't you?

FRANCES. Yes. I promise.

THE OGRE [*walking about emotionally*]. How that brings back thoughts of the old days! Things were different then! Oh, yes! Things were different. [*Suddenly he stops near her.*] Would you mind? [*He doubles her arm.*] It's all right now that we've been introduced. That's right. [*He feels her biceps with signs of joy.*] I believe, oh, I do believe that you will agree with me! [*He hastens to the kitchen table and opens a huge diary. He turns the leaves throughout the book, mumbling the names of the days.*] Monday—Wednesday—Friday—— A week from Monday; that's it! [*He turns politely to the girl.*] How would you like to make a date with me for a week from Monday?

FRANCES. A date? What for?

THE OGRE. A date for supper.

FRANCES. Don't I get anything to eat until then?

THE OGRE [*laughing heartily*]. How absurd! How perfectly preposterous! How utterly ridiculous! You get something to eat every half-hour! Every fifteen minutes, if you want it! Why, you spend the whole day eating! You tell the cook your favourite dishes, and she does nothing except cook them for you—except when she's cooking for me. And then, a week from Monday, we meet at the supper-table. Is it a go?

FRANCES. A go?

THE OGRE [*correcting himself*]. Pardon my slang. I mean, do you accept my invitation?

FRANCES [*after thinking*]. Yes; thank you.

THE OGRE. That's fine! Of course, it doesn't really matter whether you accept or not, because you'll be there, anyway. But it's always nicer to do things politely, isn't it?

FRANCES [*without answering*]. After Monday; what then?

THE JESTER. You see! She's getting suspicious!

THE OGRE [*lightly*]. After Monday? The world will go on in the same old way. And you, let us hope [*he sighs blissfully*], will be a sweet memory.

[*He strikes a gong.*

THE COOK [*entering*]. Yis, sorr?

THE OGRE. Cook, this is Frances. [*They bow to each other.*] Frances and I have made an appointment for a week from Monday.

THE COOK. Yis, sorr. I'll raymember it.

THE OGRE [*taking the* COOK *aside*]. How will we have her? Stuffed and roasted?

THE COOK [*shaking her head*]. If I'm not afther makin' a mistake, she'll do for boiling.

THE OGRE [*delighted*]. You really think so? Well, then, boiling it is. [*He hobbles to the door much more cheerfully.*] I'm beginning to feel better already. Good morning. [*He goes.*

FRANCES [*going to the* COOK]. What does he mean by roasting and boiling?

THE COOK. Don't ye know?

FRANCES. No.

THE COOK. Ye'll learn soon enough.

[*She goes, locking the entrance door behind her.* FRANCES *tries the door; it will not open.*

THE JESTER. Now she's getting very suspicious.

[FRANCES *comes back to the centre of the room, plainly worried. She goes to the great barred door, pushes aside the bars and opens it. The* DINNERS *rush in.*

FRANCES [*surprised*]. Hello!

THE DINNERS. Hello!

FRANCES. Who are you?

THE DINNERS. We are the dinners. I am the Monday

dinner. I am the Tuesday dinner. I am the Wednesday didder—the Thursday dinner—— [*A chorus.*

FRANCES. The Monday dinner ? The Tuesday dinner ? Whatever do you mean ?

THE MONDAY DINNER. He's going to eat me to-night.

FRANCES [*horrified*]. Eat you ?

THE TUESDAY DINNER [*nodding*]. And he's going to eat me to-morrow.

FRANCES. Oh !

THE WEDNESDAY DINNER [*you remember she has a cold*]. Yes ; ad he's goig to eat me Weddesday, udless she [*pointing to the* TUESDAY DINNER] upsets his stubbig !

FRANCES [*desperately*]. I don't believe it ! I don't believe it !

THE MONDAY DINNER. Do you know where you are ? This is the Ogre's Castle !

FRANCES. What of it ?

THE MONDAY DINNER. You know what an Ogre is, don't you ?

FRANCES. But—but he's such a nice old man. He said he was going to dine with me a week from Monday.

THE TUESDAY DINNER. Not *with* you ; *on* you !

THE JESTER. What a difference one little word makes !

FRANCES [*terror-stricken*]. Dine *on* me ? You mean he's going to eat me ?

THE MONDAY DINNER. Of course ! He's an Ogre.

THE TUESDAY DINNER. First he'll keep you here a week, and fatten you.

THE THURSDAY DINNER. That's what he's doing with all of us.

THE FRIDAY DINNER. He'll feel your muscle every day.

FRANCES. He's done that already !

THE WEDNESDAY DINNER. He'll feed you till you're nice [*she has a struggle pronouncing the word*] ad fat ad juicy, ad thed——

FRANCES. And then ?

THE MONDAY DINNER. Your turn will come a week from Monday.

FRANCES [*desperately*]. But I don't want to be eaten!

THE MONDAY DINNER. None of us want to be eaten. But what can we do about it?

FRANCES. I know what *I* can do about it! Go to the door! Listen! Tell me if you hear anyone coming! [*The* DINNERS *rush to the door;* FRANCES *to the telephone.*] Hello! Hello! . . . Central, please, be quick! . . . Hello, Central, give me the Supervisor! [*She turns to the* DINNERS.] Do you hear anything?

THE MONDAY DINNER. All right so far!

FRANCES. Hello, Central Supervisor? . . . Give me the telephone number of my Fairy Godmother. . . . No, I don't know where she lives, and I don't know her name. But you know, don't you? . . . Of course you know! That's what you're there for! . . . Yes; I'll hold the line; but hurry! Hurry!

THE MONDAY DINNER. The Ogre's coming!

FRANCES. Lock the door!

THE MONDAY DINNER. It's locked already. But he's unlocking it!

FRANCES. Then don't let him in!

[*A key turns gratingly in the lock, but the* DINNERS *hold fast to the knob.*

THE MONDAY DINNER. He's trying to open the door!

FRANCES. Hold tight! Hold tight! [*She turns to the telephone excitedly.*] Oh, how do you do, Fairy Godmother? This is Frances; I'm in trouble, terrible trouble. . . . What? . . . I don't have to tell you about it? You know all about it already? Oh, you *are* a Fairy Godmother! Now what am I to do? . . . Yes? . . . Yes? . . . I turn my ring twice? And then back once? Oh, thank you! Thank you ever so much! [*She hangs up.*

THE WEDNESDAY DINNER. He's gone to get the Cook!

FRANCES. Quick ! Hide !

[*The* DINNERS *rush madly out of sight. The door bursts open ; the* OGRE *and the* COOK *rush in.*

THE OGRE [*very angry*]. Who tried to keep me out ? [*He peers about and catches sight of* FRANCES.] Did you do it ? You couldn't have done it all by yourself ; you couldn't.

FRANCES. Well, if I couldn't, I didn't. So there !

THE OGRE. Be more respectful to your elders ! [*He hobbles about the room.*] There's only one of them here. Where are the others ?

FRANCES. What others ?

THE OGRE. You know well enough ! [*He turns to the* COOK.] See if they're all there ! If there's one missing— [*and he gasps at the thought*]—if there's one missing, I'll eat you [*he points a finger at the trembling* COOK], even if you're the death of me !

THE JESTER [*nodding*]. And she would be !

THE COOK [*opening the barred door and counting, terror-stricken*]. Wan — three — foive — sivin. None missing, sorr.

THE OGRE. But there might have been ! There might have been ! [*He hobbles about the room, glaring at* FRANCES.] Hum ! So this is how you repay me for my hospitality ! This is how you reward me for my kindness ! This is the thanks you give me for the food and shelter which I was ready to provide !

FRANCES. How about the food which I was to provide ?

THE OGRE. That's another matter ! Quite another matter ! [*He turns to the* COOK.] Light the fire ! See that it's good and hot ! Get the spit ready ! I'm going to do something that I've never done before in my life ; I'm going to roast her myself !

[*He turns savagely on* FRANCES.

THE COOK [*very much alarmed*]. Oh, don't do that, sorr !

THE OGRE. And why not ?

THE COOK. Ye could never eat her! Roasting's an art Ye've got to learn how!

THE OGRE. I'm going to start learning this minute.

THE COOK [*desperately*]. Lave it to me, sorr. Let me do it! [*She beckons anxiously to* FRANCES.] Come along, little girl! Come along!

THE OGRE [*furiously*]. Did you hear what I said? Well, I meant it!

THE COOK. But——

THE OGRE [*interrupting at the top of his lungs*]. Do as I say!

THE COOK [*whimpering*]. Yis, sorr.

[*She turns slowly to the door, very much frightened.*

FRANCES. No! Stop! [*The* COOK *stops.* FRANCES *turns to the* OGRE.] You're not going to eat me!

THE OGRE. No?

FRANCES. No!

THE OGRE. Well, just watch me!

FRANCES. You're nothing but a bogey man in a fairy-tale! And fairy-tales always come out happily. I've known that ever since I was five.

THE OGRE [*seizing a huge knife from the table and advancing upon her*]. And how are you going to make this one turn out happily?

FRANCES. Just so!

[*She raises her hands and turns the ring. Instantly the lights go out and thunder rumbles and crashes.*

THE OGRE [*in the dark*]. Where is she? Where is she? Let me catch her! Just let me get my hands on her!

A VOICE. Here I am!

[*The room lights up. But the voice has not come from* FRANCES; *it has come from a strapping* BOY SCOUT, *who stands, quite fearless, on the spot where she stood.*

THE COOK [*gasping with surprise*]. Saints in Hiven, how she's changed!

THE JESTER [*indicating the* OGRE *with glee*]. He's too blind to know the difference!

THE OGRE. Now I've got you!

[*He advances with his knife. As he raises it to strike the* SCOUT *knocks it out of his hand.*

THE OGRE [*collapsing with astonishment*]. She knocked it out of my hand!

THE COOK [*bursting with laughter*]. Indade *she* did!

THE OGRE [*incredulously*]. A little girl knocked that knife out of my hand! [*He goes to the* SCOUT, *still unaware of what has taken place.*] If you don't mind, may I feel your muscle?

THE SCOUT [*smiling and doubling his arm*]. Certainly!

THE OGRE [*feels*]. Oh! O-h! O-h-h!

[*He sinks helpless into a chair.*

THE SCOUT [*pointing to the barred door*]. Open that door!

THE COOK [*gesticulating at the* OGRE]. Not unless he says so.

THE SCOUT. Open that door!

[*There is a terrific hammering on the barred door.*

THE COOK. I don't dast!

THE SCOUT. You don't have to!

[*And on the word the door flies open and a troop of* BOY SCOUTS *bursts into the room.*

THE COOK. Saints preserve us!

THE OGRE [*peering at them fearfully*]. Who are you?

THE SCOUTS. I'm the Monday dinner! I'm the Tuesday dinner!—the Wednesday dinner!—the Thursday dinner!—— [*A chorus.*

THE OGRE [*rises very slowly, very feebly, and staggers towards them*]. If you don't mind? [*He feels the muscles of two or three. Then, very faintly*] I knew this was going to happen some day! [*He faints.*

THE FIRST BOY SCOUT. And now what are we going to do with him?

THE SCOUTS. Kill him! No, killing's too good for him! Yes, kill him!

THE COOK [*hastening to them*]. Go aisy, lads! Go aisy! Ye don't think the ould baste [*and she points to the unconscious form of the* OGRE] ever really et anybody?

THE PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT. He never ate anybody? I don't believe it!

THE COOK [*smiling*]. I wouldn't be afther sayin' it if he could hear me, but just bechune you an' me, lads, he never et anything but what you and I would eat! [*They look at her in astonishment. She continues confidentially.*] 'Twas himself that did the buyin', but 'twas I that did the cookin', an' what he got on his table—— [*She interrupts.*] D'ye know what it was?

THE SCOUTS. No. What was it?

THE COOK [*with great secrecy*]. Irish stew!

THE JESTER. That's why his stomach was always out of order!

THE COOK. Irish stew and Irish stew! Day in an' day out for twinty years! An' every single wan av 'em different! Once—once in a long while 'twas roast lamb; but in the main 'twas Irish stew, and then, more Irish stew!

ONE OF THE SCOUTS. But he thinks he's been eating——

THE COOK [*interrupting*]. I can't help what he thinks. He can think what he plases. If he chooses to think he's been eatin' them little dears [*and she points to the barred door and to the room which it discloses*] 'tis his privilege! But before I'd let wan av 'em come to harm, 'tis meself would take th' ould baste an' cook him in his own kitchen!

ONE OF THE SCOUTS [*after a pause*]. We've all read of Ogres.

ANOTHER. Yes.

ANOTHER. Man-eating Ogres!

THE COOK. Sure! Well, I ask ye this; did ye ever read of a man-eating Ogre ever eatin' anybody? Think careful before ye speak! Did ye ever read of any foine young hero gettin' fricasseed? Ye did not! [*Triumphantly*] An' for why? 'Twas because ivry last wan av th' Ogres

had an Irish cook, an' because when they served him up an Irish stew, how should himself know if 'twas lamb—or beef—or perhaps the loikes of you ? [*The* OGRE *moves feebly.*] Don't let on ye know, lads ! It's a trade secret !

THE PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT. There's one thing you've got to explain.

THE COOK. An' that is ?

THE PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT [*pointing to the great barred door*]. That is his larder, isn't it ? It was full of little girls. Now, what's happened to them ?

THE COOK [*scratching her head*]. That's a foine question for th' loikes of you to be askin' me !

THE PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT. Why ?

THE COOK [*perplexed*]. Afther th' magic's gone an' changed thim all into you ! [*And she points around the circle. The* SCOUTS *are puzzled. She points to the ring on the leader's finger.*] *She* had a ring loike that, an' she turned it somehow——

THE PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT. Turned it ?

[*He raises his hand curiously and examines the ring.*

THE COOK [*eagerly*]. Thry turning it !

[*The* PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT *turns the ring. Again there is darkness and rolling thunder. But when the light appears again the* BOY SCOUTS *have not vanished. Instead, next to each one stands one of the missing dinners.*

THE COOK [*triumphantly*]. Th' magic worked different this time, but there ye are !

THE OGRE [*rises feebly, and staggers to a chair. He looks around grimly and fastens his gaze upon the* COOK]. I heard what you said ! I wasn't unconscious !

THE COOK [*terrified*]. For th' love of Mike !

THE OGRE. When I thought I was eating little girls you were really serving me Irish stew ? Nothing but Irish stew ?

THE COOK [*trembling*]. Y-yis, sorr.

THE OGRE [*turning to* FRANCES *and the* DINNERS]. I take

back all the hard things I ever thought of you ! [*He rises slowly.*] Open the doors ! Let them go home !

THE DINNERS. Home ! He's going to let us go home ! We're not going to be eaten ! We're going home !

FRANCES [*who, perhaps, is a little sorry for the* OGRE, *coming to him gently*]. But what are you going to eat now ?

THE OGRE [*smiling*]. Do you really want to know ?

FRANCES. Yes.

THE OGRE. I'm going to turn vegetarian !

[*The curtains begin to close.*

THE JESTER [*rising*]. Stop ! Those curtains must not close !

FRANCES. Why not ?

THE JESTER. This is a fairy play. Where's the moral ?

THE OGRE. That's so !

THE COOK [*scratching her head*]. Well, what *is* the moral ?

THE OGRE. Maybe—maybe—I ate the moral.

[*There is a pause while everybody thinks hard.*

THE JESTER. Well, I'm waiting.

THE COOK [*with innermost conviction*]. The moral's got something to do with Irish stew !

THE OGRE [*shuddering*]. Let's hope not !

[*He swallows a pill hastily.*

FRANCES [*after another pause*]. This is the moral ; when you're in trouble, ask for the Supervisor and telephone your Fairy Godmother.

THE PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT. But what are you going to do if there's no telephone ?

FRANCES. I don't know. Let's ask the Ogre.

THE PRINCIPAL BOY SCOUT. Yes ; let's ask the Ogre.

THE COOK [*breaks into laughter, rocks back and forth doubled up with mirth. Finally, gasping for breath, wiping the tears from her eyes*]. G'wan ! Ye don't really believe in Ogres ?

THE JESTER [*with a sweeping gesture*]. *That* is the moral !

[*He bows.*

CURTAIN

THE HORDLE POACHER

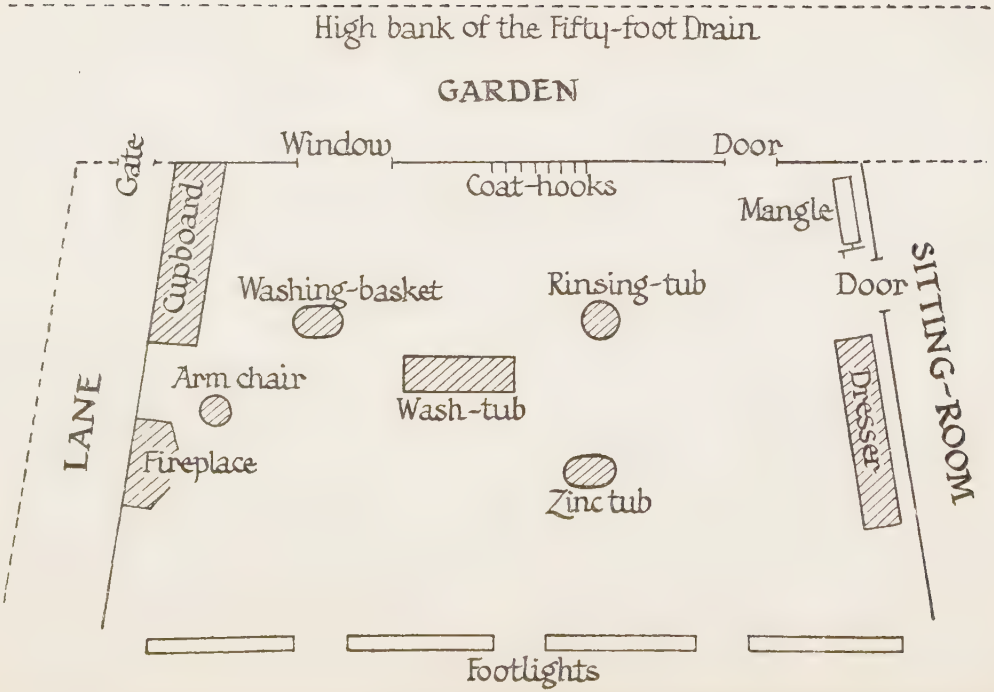
By Bernard Gilbert

CHARACTERS

Tom Hudson, *gamekeeper; age thirty-five*
Ellen Hudson, *his wife; age thirty-one*
Fred Barley, *a poacher; age thirty-three*

The play takes place in the Hudsons' cottage, near the village of Holt-in-the-Marsh.

Time for acting—about half an hour.


High bank of the Fifty-foot Drain
GARDEN
Gate
Window
Door
Coat-hooks
Mangle
Cupboard
Washing-basket
Rinsing-tub
Door
SITTING-ROOM
LANE
Arm chair
Wash-tub
Dresser
Fireplace
Zinc tub
Footlights

THE HORDLE POACHER[1]

Extract from County Directory

Holt-in-the-Marsh is a village of 456 inhabitants. Marsh House, the seat of Lord Marshfellowton, who owns much of the parish, is occupied by his agent, Evelyn Wincey, Esquire. Titus Ambrose, Esquire, is a large landowner here. The two great Fen waterways, the Old Cut Drain and the Fifty-foot Drain, meet at Holt Sluice. Holt Marsh, a stretch of grazing-land flooded in winter, is drained by Holt Creek, a partly natural, partly artificial, watercourse, which discharges into the sea through the Old Roman Bank at Fleet St Andrew's Sluice-gate. There is a foal fair here in September. Church—Holy Trinity. Rector—Rev. A. Moxey. Wesleyan Chapel. Bottle and Glass Inn (Gregory Ingamells). Carpenter's Arms Inn (J. Frost). Black Horse Inn (L. Ford).

The curtain rises early one November morning on the kitchen of a gamekeeper's cottage which stands at the end of a lane off the main road from Fletton to Holt-in-the-Marsh. The kitchen is a large one, with a brick floor and whitewashed walls. In the centre of the right wall is a door into the sitting-room. On the left of this door is a mangle, and on its right a dresser. The fireplace and a large cupboard occupy the left wall. The back wall has a door on the right and a window on the left commanding the garden, at the end of which is seen the very high bank of the Fifty-foot Drain, which takes its name from its width and runs as straight as if it had been drawn with a ruler from Winch Brook to the Great Sluice at Tanvats.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

ELLEN HUDSON, *the keeper's wife, standing behind a wash-tub in the centre of the floor, with her sleeves rolled up, is a big woman, thirty-one years of age, bursting with health. She has straight black hair, combed off her forehead and knotted at the back, bright brown eyes, and rosy cheeks of a hard plumpness that only long outdoor life can give. She is wearing a rather faded print frock and an apron of coarse brown sacking. Behind her are a basket of already washed articles and a rinsing-tub on a stool. Between her and the dresser stands a small zinc bath heaped up with clothes awaiting their turn, on the top of which lies a soiled print gown. An armchair is drawn up to the fire.*

A man is seen passing the window.

The door opens, and TOM HUDSON *enters with a gun under his arm. He threads his way across the kitchen to the fireplace, nearly knocking the washing basket over, and puts his gun against the wall beside the cupboard.*

ELLEN. Hey! Mind where you're stepping! [TOM *sits down by the fireside without speaking. He is between thirty-five and forty years of age, of middle height, broad-shouldered and muscular, and is wearing an old velveteen jacket, a dark red knitted waistcoat, cloth breeches, leather leggings, stout shooting-boots, and a flat tweed cap.*] What's up? Don't sit there like a frog with one leg. I didn't mind so much last night, 'coz I thought you was done up, but I'm too busy to do with it this morning.

TOM. It's Mester Wincey.

ELLEN. What's wrong with him?

TOM. He sent for me yesterday afternoon up to Marsh House to say as he wasn't very well satisfied.

ELLEN [*wringing out the article she is washing, and throwing it into the basket*]. Oh, isn't he?

TOM. I felt like telling him to get suited with somebody else.

ELLEN [*starting on a tablecloth*]. We can't afford to move about the country every week. What's he want to grumble about, anyway ?

TOM. The same old tale—poaching.

ELLEN. Why doesn't he give you more help, then ?

TOM. That's what I say ; but he goes on about the reputation as I brought from Cowsley, and the great wage he's giving me for his lordship.

ELLEN. Great wage ? [*Turning to him*] What great wage ?

TOM [*hanging up his cap on a peg*]. That's what he calls it.

ELLEN [*resuming her washing*]. Huh ! Twenty-three shillings and a cottage, without so much as an outhouse to do a bit of washing in ! The man as built this place never had no wife, I know.

TOM. He says he got me to come to Holt to put down the poaching—as if I didn't know that !

ELLEN. Well, you've stopped most of it, haven't you ?

TOM. I could stop the lot if I had a bit more help. The place got so bad under the last man that anybody but *me* would have been flummuxed altogether ; yet the agent reckons I'm going to get it all made right in about ten minutes.

ELLEN. He must be a fool !

TOM [*fiercely*]. He talks as soft as a turnip.

ELLEN. What's tittled him up just now ?

TOM. Why—night before last somebody got into yon spinney at the end of the lane—the one we're so careful over—and helped himself.

ELLEN. Oh ! Where was you ?

TOM. T'other end of the Estate—up by Fletton Woods.

ELLEN. Who was it ? Do you know ?

TOM. I've a good idea.

ELLEN. Oh! Who?

TOM. A chap as is stopping at the Bottle and Glass; a regular loafing fellow. Toby Morton says he's been boasting as how he could give any keeper a lesson, and should take what he wanted where he liked.

[*He fetches his gun, and starts to clean it with a rag from his pocket.*

ELLEN. And can't you catch him?

TOM. He's as full of craft as a wagon-load of monkeys with their tails burnt off. Keeper Jackson of Fletton told me all about him. I had young Walter Bealby watching the Bottle and Glass all yesterday, but he didn't stir an inch, and when night come I went down myself.

ELLEN. And what happened?

TOM. I watched the front door, and Walter watched the back, but he must have got out without either of us seeing him.

ELLEN. How did he manage that?

TOM. That's more than I can tell you. The lad swore as he didn't go out by the back, and I know him to be a smart boy. Anyhow, he got out, and what's more, went to the same spinney again.

ELLEN. He didn't!

TOM. He did. And what's more'n that, he must have been at work inside while I stood on the road listening, because when I found as he didn't come out after ten o'clock, I walked to the spinney and waited there for a nice time, but I never heard as much as a squeak! I tell you, Nell, I'm about bottled.

ELLEN [*drying her hands on her apron, poking the fire, and putting the kettle on*]. Well, well, have a bit of breakfast, and you'll feel ever so much better. You've been worrying out yonder on an empty stomach, and nothing's worse than that.

TOM. Yon chap's took my appetite away.

ELLEN [*crossing to the dresser and reaching down a cup, saucer, and plate*]. Do you know who he is ?

TOM. Barley, they call him, and he comes from Hordle.

ELLEN. A " Hordle Hound," is he ? Have your breakfast, anyway. I can get it ready in a minute.

TOM [*rising and getting his gun*]. No, not yet. I'll go and look at yon new eel-trap first ; then, maybe, I shall feel more like it.

ELLEN. You have to catch poachers with the game on them, don't you ?

TOM [*sarcastically*]. That's all !

ELLEN [*thoughtfully*]. There must be some way of nailing him.

TOM [*bursting out*]. I've a good mind to go to the Bottle and Glass and crack his head for him.

ELLEN. No, no ! You must catch him.

TOM. How ?

ELLEN. By craft.

TOM. You mean put salt on his tail ?

ELLEN. The folks in these Fens, Tom, is different to them as we've been used to in yon Wolds. They're a cunning lot, and the only way to match 'em is to be cunninger still.

TOM. That's all very well, but how can I deal with a score at once ? Everybody down here has either a dog or a gun, and most of 'em has both. All the agent says is, " Come, Hudson, be sharp ; show 'em what you're made of," as if I were forty men all rolled into one. It's enough to sicken a cat.

ELLEN. You go and look at your eel-trap, and when you come back I'll get your breakfast. Oh, yes—while you're out there, you might have a look at the end clothes-post. It's wembling about till I can hardly hang the things up.

TOM. All right !

ELLEN. And don't worry yourself any more. We shall catch this man before we've done.

TOM [*in the doorway*]. Ay! I've no doubt *we* shall —leastways *you* will. *You*'ll be up to-night by yon spinney, and when he comes creeping up a dyke, *you*'ll nab him single-handed, no doubt. And then the agent'll make *you* keeper in my place.

ELLEN [*calmly*]. Maybe I could catch him, Tom Hudson, and maybe I couldn't; but mark my words—there's more done in this world by using your wits than by losing your temper.

TOM [*savagely*]. Anybody 'ud think as you'd been one of Solomon's three hundred wives!

[*He slams the door behind him.*

ELLEN. Tchk! Tchk! I do believe some husbands think they've all the sense, and us women isn't fit for anything but washing clothes. [*She scrubs vigorously.*] I wish I'd been a man. I'd have learned some of 'em, that I would. They don't think a woman's work is anything at all, but I should like to see them setting themselves to it. [*A man is seen passing the window, and there is a knock at the door.*] Who's that?

[*The door opens gently to show* FRED BARLEY. *He is about the same age and height as* TOM HUDSON, *but not nearly so well developed, so that he looks smaller. He is quick in his movements, and rather ferrety in appearance, having reddish hair and red-brown eyes. His trousers* (*which appear to have been made of sailcloth*) *are hitched up by straps under the knees, his boots are very heavy and dirty, and a linen bag is slung over his shoulder.*

FRED. Good morning, missis! I've lost my way somehow. Can you set me right again?

ELLEN [*scrutinizing him closely*]. How come you to lose your way?

FRED [*stepping into the kitchen and closing the door behind him*]. This is the awkwardest country for a stranger

as I ever did see. There's nothing but marshes and rivers, and being neither a bird nor a fish, I'm stopped at every turn.

ELLEN. You aren't a pedlar, are you ?

FRED [*putting his bag on the floor*]. I've been working on the big Sluice at Tanvats, but I had a disagreement with the foreman, and left.

ELLEN. Are you tramping the country, then ?

FRED. I heard as a very big farmer this way was short of hands, and I'm off to him for a job.

ELLEN. Who might that be ?

FRED. Ambrose—Titus Ambrose of Holt.

ELLEN. Oh, him ! You're not far away—only a matter of a couple of miles, but how did you get down this lane ?

FRED. Some great fool of a roadman told me to take the first turning to the right.

ELLEN. He meant the *next* turning. This isn't a road, it doesn't lead anywhere. What sort of a place are you after ?

FRED. I don't care a deal what it is : wagoner, groom, gardener, ploughman, potato-picker, or foreman—I can turn my hand to anything.

ELLEN. How is it you don't stop in one place, if you're so clever ?

FRED. When my master's satisfied I'm not ; and when I'm satisfied he isn't ; and so we soon part.

ELLEN. Rolling stones gather no moss, young fellow.

FRED [*warming his hands at the fire*]. I don't want to gather no moss. I aren't a toadstool.

ELLEN. You don't sound as if you wanted to find a deal of work, either. Where do you come from ?

FRED. Hordle.

ELLEN [*taking a surreptitious glance at his bag*]. Hordle ! Oh !

FRED. What's the matter with Hordle ?

ELLEN. It's a rum place, isn't it ?

FRED. It's a good place.

ELLEN. Umm !

FRED. It is, for all your umming.

ELLEN. Then what did you leave it for ?

FRED. For a change. Could you give me a drop of drink, missis ? I'm as dry as a fish what's been caught three weeks.

ELLEN. I'll give you a drink as you haven't tasted for many a long day. [*She goes to the dresser and pours him out a glass of water.*] There you are—Adam's grog !

FRED [*taking a very small sip and giving her back the glass*]. Thank you kindly, missis ; and now I must be off. [*He picks up his bag.*

ELLEN. Don't you want any more ?

FRED. No, thanks. I'm hardly used to it, and it might go to my head. [*He turns to the door.*

ELLEN. Don't be in such a hurry. I'm glad of a bit of company. If you'll sit down for a few minutes, I'll see if there's a drop of my elderberry wine left.

FRED [*sociably*]. I don't mind if I do.

[*He returns to the fire, putting his bag under the chair, and making himself comfortable, whilst* ELLEN *glances anxiously out of the window for signs of her husband as she goes to the cupboard. She fills a tumbler half full of home-made wine, and gives it to* FRED.

ELLEN. There you are. Try that !

FRED [*smacking his lips*]. That's a bit of all right, that is !

ELLEN. What did you say your name was ?

FRED. Barley—Fred Barley.

ELLEN [*recommencing her washing*]. Then let me warn you, Mr Barley from Hordle, as you're not in No Man's Land now. The land round here all belongs to Lord Marshfellowton, and the game's strictly preserved.

FRED [*amiably*]. Well, what's that matter to you—your husband isn't the lord, is he ?

ELLEN. I was only warning you.

FRED. What I say is—game's game, and belongs to them as can get it. These lords has no right to preserve it at all.

ELLEN. Folks can do what they like with their own, can't they ?

FRED. The land ought to belong to them as lives on it.

ELLEN [*taking a covert glance out of the window*]. You're a Radical, I can easy see.

FRED. No—Labour. We're going to split these great estates up, and then I shall have a little farm. I'm all for a bit of land, I am.

ELLEN. Them that has small holdings works a deal harder than you've ever done, my man.

FRED [*ignoring this*]. As Bob Cutts says—game's wild, and should belong to them as can catch it.

ELLEN. You'd better tell that to the keepers.

FRED. Keepers ! I care naught for keepers.

ELLEN. Don't you, now ?

FRED. I don't. A lot of mucky, sneaking fellows, I calls 'em, as earns their keep by spying on their neighbours !

ELLEN. Oh, that's it, is it ?

FRED. We care for nobody at Hordle, neither lords nor earls. They tell me this Marshfellowton's as savage at preserving game as old Rupert Harbord was. Reckon they're above the law, don't they, these landowners ! I'd as leave give one a broggle with a stick as look at him.

ELLEN. You're a nice sort to come here for work.

FRED. Why ? Isn't there anybody round here as does a bit of poaching ?

ELLEN. Plenty. But our agent's got a brand-new keeper to put a stop to it.

FRED. I heard all about this fine keeper last night.

ELLEN. Oh, where were you ?

FRED. Stopping at the Bottle and Glass—by the cross-roads.

ELLEN [*looking out of the window*]. A low place !

FRED. That's as may be, but they've good ale. [*He finishes his wine, and says politely*] Though it isn't up to *this*, of course. Anyway, I heard all about this keeper, and so I went to have a look at him.

ELLEN. Did you see him ?

FRED. No, I didn't, and what's more, he didn't see me.

ELLEN. He would have done if you'd been up to any tricks.

FRED [*sarcastically*]. Would he now ?

ELLEN. He would, and quick !

FRED. Indeed !

ELLEN. And if you try any of your games here, you'll be in jail before you can say " Knife."

FRED. I'm glad to know that, missis, because, being a stranger in these parts, and not knowing the ways about here, I might easy have got myself into trouble.

ELLEN. You easy might !

FRED. 'Coz if any old keeper was to come nosing round, and happened to look in this here bag of mine [*he stoops down and opens its mouth to show the contents to* ELLEN], they might get a wrong idea altogether, mightn't they ?

ELLEN [*putting her hands on her hips*]. Well !

FRED [*closing the bag*]. Anybody might fancy as there was a brace of birds in there, mightn't they ?

ELLEN [*in pretended admiration*]. You rascal !

FRED. If that brand-new keeper was to see 'em, he wouldn't like it at all, would he ?

ELLEN. Where did you get 'em ?

FRED. I found 'em on the road.

ELLEN. That's all a bag of moonshine, that is.

FRED. P'raps it is, and p'raps it isn't ; anyway, I found 'em.

ELLEN. I don't believe a word of it. You're no poacher.

You're not half sharp enough. Somebody's given 'em to you.

FRED [*rising to the bait*]. Oh, have they! Then let me tell you they came out of that spinney at the end of the lane.

ELLEN. You must be an old hand. Have you ever been before the bench at Bly?

FRED. What do you take me for? You might catch Soldier John asleep, but not a Hordle man napping. Well, I must be off! You said down this lane, and the first to the right, didn't you? Isn't there a nearer way?

ELLEN. There's no way at all past this house, unless you swim the Fifty-foot, and that's full to the top of the bank.

FRED [*picking up his bag and rising*]. Well, thank ye kindly, missis. Should you like a hare, now [*he half opens the bag*], for your drop of drink and your good advice?

ELLEN [*sharply*]. No—I don't want it.

FRED. She's as plump as butter, and would go well with a bit of fat bacon.

ELLEN. You mustn't leave it here.

FRED [*advancing on* ELLEN *amorously*]. Pop it into your pantry, and you can give me a kiss for it, if you like.

ELLEN. A little less of your chelp, my man!

FRED [*closing his bag*]. All right, missis! No offence! You needn't have neither, if you don't want. [*He half opens the door, then closes it quickly and quietly, and returns to* ELLEN, *speaking in quite a different tone.*] I say, missis, who's that man standing in your garden?

ELLEN [*glancing carelessly towards the window, but not moving from her tub*]. I don't know. What's he look like?

FRED. He's got a gun under his arm.

ELLEN [*going to the window*]. Why, that's the very chap you were talking about—the new keeper.

FRED. This is no place for me, then. Which way can I get without him seeing me?

ELLEN. There isn't any way—I told you.

FRED [*looking very anxious indeed*]. He's after me, I reckon. Can't I slip out of your front door and across the fields ?

ELLEN. There's no cover anywhere. Besides, they're all flooded, and you couldn't run across them.

FRED. What am I to do, then ?

ELLEN. I don't know.

FRED. Oh, but, missis, do help us ! *He's coming.*

ELLEN [*picking up the soiled print gown*]. Here ! Slip this on, and pretend you're washing, and I'll go into the sitting-room out of the way. He doesn't know me—and you keep your back to him.

FRED [*holding the gown up helplessly*]. But it'll never hide me.

ELLEN. That it will ! Hold your arms up ! [*She slips the gown on him.*] There you are !

[*She ties her apron round him, and, picking a sun-bonnet out of the basket, puts it on his head.*

FRED. Ugh ! It's all wet.

ELLEN. That's better than going to jail. Now roll your sleeves back, and start washing.

[*As* FRED *begins scrubbing desperately* ELLEN *slips quietly to the window, and beckons urgently to her husband.*

FRED. Am I all right ?

ELLEN [*crossing to the sitting-room door*]. Yes, as long as you keep on scrubbing, and don't let him see your face.

[*She goes into the sitting-room, leaving the door ajar.*

FRED. But it's all sky-wannock—it's slipping—hey ! missis !

[*He hitches the gown up and straightens the bonnet, then remembers, with horror, his bag of game. Shuffling desperately to the chair, he picks it up, looks wildly round, hears a step outside the door,*

and drops it into the wash-tub. When the door is opened and TOM HUDSON *enters* FRED *is bent over the wash-tub hard at work.* ELLEN, *peeping out of the sitting-room door, with a finger on her lips, points to* FRED'S *feet.* TOM, *noticing* FRED'S *boots, nods to* ELLEN *and grins.*

TOM. Good morning, missis ! It's a fine day for the time of year.

FRED [*without looking up, and in a hoarse voice*]. Morning.

TOM. You're a bit hoarse to-day, missis, aren't you ?

FRED [*bending lower over the tub*]. What do you want ?

TOM. I'm looking for a poaching fellow as come this way. Have you seen anything of him ? [FRED *shakes his head.*] He couldn't get past, unless he's drowned himself in the Fifty-foot. Maybe he has.

FRED. Maybe.

TOM. But that wouldn't do at all. I want to catch him alive, and get him before our agent. He'll poach him on toast. [*He goes closer.*] Why, missis, your bonnet's wet. You'll catch your death of cold !

FRED. I'm used to it.

TOM. It would give me the rheumatics something awful. [FRED *grunts scornfully.*] You must be a tough old dame ! [*He pauses to admire* FRED'S *gown.*] Why, missis, you've got some rare stout boots on !

FRED [*trying to hide his feet*]. I suffer so from corns. They're my poor husband's.

TOM. Is he dead ?

FRED. Yes.

TOM. I'm very sorry to hear that ! [FRED *shakes his head mournfully.*] Oh, cheer up, missis ! You'll easy find another—a well-built woman like you.

FRED. Never.

TOM. Never say die ! If you're lonely, I'll keep you company a bit.

[*He slips his arm round* FRED'S *waist.* ELLEN,

convulsed with laughter, claps her hand over her mouth.

FRED [*edging away from* TOM, *and clutching at his bonnet*]. Gie ower !

TOM [*stepping back*]. Why ! You've got trousers on ! Are they your poor husband's as well ?

FRED [*giving his gown a hitch*]. Yes !

[*He washes harder than ever.*

TOM. You might give us a kiss. Take your bonnet off, so as I can see your pretty face.

FRED [*waving one arm threateningly behind him, and bending lower over the wash-tub*]. Be off wi' you !

[ELLEN *is threatened with hysterics.*

TOM [*purple with suppressed laughter*]. Don't take on so. It were only my fun.

FRED [*forgetting, in his desperation, his assumed sex, and speaking in his natural voice*]. Clear out of my house, you great vagabond !

TOM. But it ain't your house !

FRED. What do you mean ?

TOM. Well, you see—it happens to be *my* house.

FRED. What !

[*He starts back in alarm, and the sun-bonnet falls on to his shoulders as he tears the apron violently off.*

ELLEN [*coming right into the room, wiping her eyes, as* TOM *steps back to guard the outer door*]. He makes a fine lass, doesn't he ?

[FRED *takes a quick step towards the door, trying to get the gown off, but it sticks fast over his head.*

TOM [*with his back to the door*]. You'd better help him out, Nell, or he'll end your frock.

[FRED, *walking backwards, still enveloped in the gown, comes to the washing basket and promptly sits down in it.* ELLEN *hurries to him and helps him out of her gown, and unties the sun-bonnet.*

ELLEN. Steady on, you great ummy-dummy !

FRED [*struggling out of the basket*]. Well, I'm blowed !

ELLEN. You're the one as always gets the best of keepers ! [*Looking round*] Why ! Where's he put his bag ?

TOM. What bag ?

ELLEN. He's got a hare and a brace of birds, what he's owned come out of yon spinney.

TOM [*stepping forward excitedly*]. That's what I want to see ! Where have you put it ?

FRED [*glancing uneasily at the wash-tub*]. I ain't got no bag !

ELLEN [*who has caught his glance*]. What ! you never . . . [*going to the tub and fishing out the bag*], you mucky toad ! [*Throwing it along the floor to* TOM] *You mucky toad !*

TOM [*taking up the bag, and looking into it with immense satisfaction, as* FRED *falls dejectedly into the chair by the fire*]. Never mind, missis. We've got our own back, thanks to you !

FRED. Done—by a woman ! I'll never have no truck with another as long as I live.

ELLEN. And a very good thing for them if you don't. [*She goes to her wash-tub.*] Take him away, Tom. [*She ties the apron round her.*] Take him off, and let me get on with my business ; I've been hindered enough as it is.

[*She recommences her washing.*

CURTAIN

THE KNAVE OF HEARTS

By Louise Saunders

CHARACTERS

The Manager
Blue Hose
Yellow Hose
1st Herald
2nd Herald
Pompdebile the Eighth, *King of Hearts*
(*pronounced Pomp*-di*biley*)
The Chancellor
The Knave of Hearts
Ursula
The Lady Violetta
Six Little Pages

THE KNAVE OF HEARTS[1]

The MANAGER *appears before the curtain in doublet and hose. He carries a cap with a long red feather.*

MANAGER [*bowing deeply*]. Ladies and gentlemen, you are about to hear the truth of an old legend that has persisted wrongly through the ages, the truth that, until now, has been hid behind the embroidered curtain of a rhyme, about the Knave of Hearts, who was no knave, but a very hero indeed. The truth, you will agree with me, gentlemen and most honoured ladies, is rare! It is only the quiet, unimpassioned things of nature that seem what they are. Clouds rolled in massy radiance against the blue, pines shadowed deep and darkly green, mirrored in still waters, the contemplative mystery of the hills—these things which exist, absorbed but in their own existence—these are the perfect chalices of truth.

But we, gentlemen and thrice-honoured ladies, flounder about in a tangled net of prejudice, of intrigue. We are blinded by conventions, we are crushed by misunderstanding, we are distracted by violence, we are deceived by hypocrisy, until only too often villains receive the rewards of nobility and the truly great-hearted are suspected, distrusted, and maligned.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, for the sake of justice and also, I dare to hope, for your approval, I have taken my puppets down from their dusty shelves. I have polished

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Charles Scribner's Sons, 597 Fifth Avenue, New York.

their faces, brushed their clothes, and strung them on wires, so that they may enact for you this history.

[*He parts the curtains, revealing two* PASTRY-COOKS *in flaring white caps and spotless aprons leaning over in stiff profile, their wooden spoons, three feet long, pointing rigidly to the ceiling. They are in one of the kitchens of* POMPDEBILE THE EIGHTH, *King of Hearts. It is a pleasant kitchen, with a row of little dormer windows and a huge stove, adorned with the crest of* POMPDEBILE — *a heart rampant on a gold shield.*

MANAGER. You see here, ladies and gentlemen, two pastry-cooks belonging to the royal household of Pompdebile the Eighth—Blue Hose and Yellow Hose by name. At a signal from me they will spring to action, and as they have been made with astonishing cleverness, they will bear every semblance of life. Happily, however, you need have no fear that, should they please you, the exulting wine of your appreciation may go to their heads —their heads being but things of wire and wood; and happily, too, as they are but wood and wire, they will be spared the shame and humiliation that would otherwise be theirs should they fail to meet with your approval.

The play, most honoured ladies and gentlemen, will now begin.

[*He claps his hands. Instantly the two* PASTRY-COOKS *come to life. The* MANAGER *bows himself off the stage.*

BLUE HOSE. Is everything ready for this great event?

YELLOW HOSE. Everything. The fire blazing in the stove, the pages, dressed in their best, waiting in the pantry with their various jars full of the finest butter, the sweetest sugar, the hottest pepper, the richest milk, the——

BLUE HOSE. Yes, yes, no doubt. [*Thoughtfully*] It is

a great responsibility, this that they have put on our shoulders.

YELLOW HOSE. Ah, yes! I have never felt more important.

BLUE HOSE. Nor I more uncomfortable.

YELLOW HOSE. Even on the day, or rather the night, when I awoke and found myself famous—I refer to the time when I laid before an astonished world my creation, "Humming birds' hearts *soufflé, au vin blanc*"—I did not feel more important. It is a pleasing sensation!

BLUE HOSE. I like it not at all. It makes me dizzy, this eminence on which they have placed us. The Lady Violetta is slim and fair. She does not, in my opinion, look like the kind of person who is capable of making good pastry. I have discovered through long experience that it is the heaviest women who make the lightest pastry, and *vice versa*. Well, then, suppose that she does not pass this examination—suppose that her pastry is lumpy, white like the skin of a boiled fowl.

YELLOW HOSE. Then, according to the law of the Kingdom of Hearts, we must condemn it, and the Lady Violetta cannot become the bride of Pompdebile. Back to her native land she will be sent, riding a mule.

BLUE HOSE. And she is so pretty, so exquisite! What a law! What an outrageous law!

YELLOW HOSE. Outrageous law! How dare you! There is nothing so necessary to the welfare of the nation as our art. Good cooks make good tempers, don't they? Must not the Queen set an example for the other women to follow? Did not our fathers and our grandfathers before us judge the dishes of the previous Queens of Hearts?

BLUE HOSE. I wish I were mixing the rolls for to-morrow's breakfast.

YELLOW HOSE. Bah! You are fit for nothing else. The affairs of State are beyond you.

[*Distant sound of trumpets.*

BLUE HOSE [*nervously*]. What's that ?

YELLOW HOSE. The King is approaching ! The ceremonies are about to commence !

BLUE HOSE. Is everything ready ?

YELLOW HOSE. I told you that everything was ready. Stand still ; you are as white as a stalk of celery.

BLUE HOSE [*counting on his fingers*]. Apples, lemons, peaches, jam—— Jam ! Did you forget jam ?

YELLOW HOSE. Zounds, I did !

BLUE HOSE [*wailing*]. We are lost !

YELLOW HOSE. She may not call for it.

[*Both stand very erect and make a desperate effort to appear calm.*

BLUE HOSE [*very nervous*]. Which door ? Which door ?

YELLOW HOSE. The big one, idiot. Be still !

[*The sound of trumpets increases, and cries of "Make way for the King !" Two* HERALDS *come in and stand on either side of the door. The* KING OF HEARTS *enters, followed by ladies and gentlemen of the Court.* POMPDEBILE *is in full regalia, and very imposing indeed with his red robe bordered with ermine, his crown and sceptre. After him comes the* CHANCELLOR, *an old man with a short white beard. The* KING *strides in a particularly kingly fashion, pointing his toes in the air at every step, toward his throne, and sits down. The* KNAVE *walks behind him slowly. He has a sharp, pale face.*

POMPDEBILE [*impressively*]. Lords and ladies of the Court, this is an important moment in the history of our reign. The Lady Violetta, whom you love and respect—that is, I mean to say, whom the ladies love and the lords —er—respect, is about to prove whether or not she be fitted to hold the exalted position of Queen of Hearts, according to the law, made a thousand years ago by Pompdebile the Great, and steadily followed ever since.

She will prepare with her own delicate, white hands a dish of pastry. This will be judged by the two finest pastry-cooks in the land.

[BLUE HOSE *and* YELLOW HOSE *bow deeply*.

If their verdict be favourable, she shall ride through the streets of the city on a white palfrey, garlanded with flowers. She will be crowned, the populace will cheer her, and she will reign by our side, attending to the domestic affairs of the realm, while we give our time to weightier matters. This of course you all understand is a time of great anxiety for the Lady Violetta. She will appear worried—— [*To* CHANCELLOR] The palfrey is in readiness, we suppose.

CHANCELLOR. It is, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. Garlanded with flowers ?

CHANCELLOR. With roses, your Majesty.

KNAVE [*bowing*]. The Lady Violetta prefers violets, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. Let there be a few violets put in with the roses—er—— We are ready for the ceremony to commence. We confess to a slight nervousness unbecoming to one of our station. The Lady Violetta, though trying at times, we have found—er—shall we say—er—satisfying ?

KNAVE [*bowing*]. Intoxicating, your Majesty ?

CHANCELLOR [*shortly*]. His Majesty means nothing of the sort.

POMPDEBILE. No, of course not—er—— The mule—— Is that—did you——

CHANCELLOR [*in a grieved tone*]. This is hardly necessary. Have I ever neglected or forgotten any of your commands, your Majesty ?

POMPDEBILE. You have, often. However, don't be insulted. It takes a great deal of our time, and it is most uninteresting.

CHANCELLOR [*indignantly*]. I resign, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. Your thirty-seventh resignation will be

accepted to-morrow. Just now it is our wish to begin at once. The anxiety that no doubt gathered in the breast of each of the seven successive Pompdebiles before us seems to have concentrated in ours. Already the people are clamouring at the gates of the palace to know the decision. Begin. Let the pages be summoned.

KNAVE [*bowing*]. Beg pardon, your Majesty; before summoning the pages, should not the Lady Violetta be here?

POMPDEBILE. She should, and is, we presume, on the other side of that door—waiting breathlessly.

[*The* KNAVE *quietly opens the door and closes it.*

KNAVE [*bowing*]. She is not, your Majesty, on the other side of that door waiting breathlessly. In fact, to speak plainly, she is not on the other side of that door at all.

POMPDEBILE. Can that be true? Where are her ladies?

KNAVE. They are all there, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. Summon one of them.

[*The* KNAVE *goes out, shutting the door. He returns, following* URSULA, *who, very much frightened, throws herself at the* KING'S *feet.*

POMPDEBILE. Where is your mistress?

URSULA. She has gone, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. Gone! Where has she gone?

URSULA. I do not know, your Majesty. She was with us a while ago, waiting there, as you commanded.

POMPDEBILE. Yes, and then—speak.

URSULA. Then she started out and forbade us to go with her.

POMPDEBILE. The thought of possible divorce from us was more than she could bear. Did she say anything before she left?

URSULA [*trembling*]. Yes, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. What was it? She may have gone to self-destruction. What was it?

URSULA. She said——

POMPDEBILE. Speak, woman, speak.

URSULA. She said that your Majesty——

POMPDEBILE. A farewell message ! Go on.

URSULA [*gasping*]. That your Majesty was ' pokey, and that she didn't intend to stay there any longer.

POMPDEBILE [*roaring*]. *Pokey ! !*

URSULA. Yes, your Majesty, and she bade me call her when you came, but we can't find her, your Majesty.

[*The* PASTRY-COOKS *whisper.* URSULA *is in tears.*

CHANCELLOR. This should not be countenanced, your Majesty. The word ' pokey ' cannot be found in the dictionary. It is the most flagrant disrespect to use a word that is not in the dictionary in connection with a king.

POMPDEBILE. We are quite aware of that, Chancellor, and although we may appear calm on the surface, inwardly we are swelling, *swelling*, with rage and indignation.

KNAVE [*looking out of the window*]. I see the Lady Violetta in the garden. [*He goes to the door and holds it open, bowing.*] The Lady Violetta is at the door, your Majesty.

[*Enter the* LADY VIOLETTA, *her purple train over her arm. She has been running.*

VIOLETTA. Am I late ? I just remembered, and came as fast as I could. I bumped into a sentry and he fell down. I didn't. That's strange, isn't it ? I suppose it's because he stands in one position so long he—— Why, Pompy dear, what's the matter ? Oh, oh ! [*Walking closer*] Your feelings are hurt !

POMPDEBILE. *Don't* call us Pompy. It doesn't seem to matter to you whether you are divorced or not.

VIOLETTA [*anxiously*]. Is that why your feelings are hurt ?

POMPDEBILE. Our feelings are not hurt ; not at all.

VIOLETTA. Oh, yes, they are, Pompdebile dear. I know, because they are connected with your eyebrows. When your feelings go down up go your eyebrows, and when your feelings go up, they go down —always.

POMPDEBILE [*severely*]. Where have you been ?

VIOLETTA. I, just now ?

POMPDEBILE. Just now, when you should have been outside that door waiting *breathlessly*.

VIOLETTA. I was in the garden. Really, Pompy, you couldn't expect me to stay all day in that ridiculous pantry ; and as for being breathless, it's quite impossible to be it unless one has been jumping or something.

POMPDEBILE. What were you doing in the garden ?

VIOLETTA [*laughing*]. Oh, it was too funny ! I must tell you. I found a goat there who had a beard just like the Chancellor's—really it was quite remarkable, the resemblance—in other ways too. I took him by the horns and I looked deep into his eyes, and I said, " Chancellor, if you try to influence Pompy——"

POMPDEBILE [*shouting*]. Don't call us Pompy !

VIOLETTA. Excuse me, Pomp—— [*Checking herself.*

KNAVE. And yet I think I remember hearing of an emperor, a great emperor, named Pompey.

POMPDEBILE. We know him not. Begin at once ; the people are clamouring at the gates. Bring the ingredients.

[*The* PASTRY-COOKS *open the door, and, single file, six little boys march in, bearing large jars labelled butter, salt, flour, pepper, cinnamon, and milk. The* COOKS *place a table and a large bowl and a pan in front of the* LADY VIOLETTA *and give her a spoon. The six little boys stand three on each side.*

VIOLETTA. Oh, what darling little ingredients ! May I have an apron, please ?

[URSULA *puts a silk apron, embroidered with red hearts, on the* LADY VIOLETTA.

BLUE HOSE. We were unable to find a little boy to carry the pepper, my lady. They all *would* sneeze in such a disturbing way.

VIOLETTA. This is a perfectly controlled little boy. He hasn't sneezed once.

YELLOW HOSE. That, if you please your ladyship, is not a little boy.

VIOLETTA. Oh ! How nice ! Perhaps she will help me.

CHANCELLOR [*severely*]. You are allowed no help, Lady Violetta.

VIOLETTA. Oh, Chancellor, how cruel of you ! [*She takes up the spoon, bowing.*] Your Majesty, lords and ladies of the Court, I propose to make [*impressively*] raspberry tarts.

BLUE HOSE. Heaven be kind to us !

YELLOW HOSE [*suddenly agitated*]. Your Majesty, I implore your forgiveness. There is no raspberry jam in the palace.

POMPDEBILE. What ! Who is responsible for this carelessness ?

BLUE HOSE. I gave the order to the grocer, but it didn't come. [*Aside*] I knew something like this would happen. I knew it.

VIOLETTA [*untying her apron*]. Then, Pompdebile, I'm very sorry—we shall have to postpone it.

CHANCELLOR. If I may be allowed to suggest, Lady Violetta can prepare something else.

KNAVE. The law distinctly says that the Queen-elect has the privilege of choosing the dish which she prefers to prepare.

VIOLETTA. Dear Pompdebile, let's give it up. It's such a silly law ! Why should a great splendid ruler like you follow it just because one of your ancestors, who wasn't half as nice as you are, or one bit wiser, said you were to do so ? Dearest Pompdebile, please !

POMPDEBILE. We are inclined to think that there may be something in what the Lady Violetta says.

CHANCELLOR. I can no longer remain silent. It is due to that brilliant law of Pompdebile the First, justly called the

Great, that all members of our male sex are well fed, and, as a natural consequence, happy.

KNAVE. The happiness of a set of moles who never knew the sunlight.

POMPDEBILE. If we made an effort, we could think of a new law—just as wise. It only requires effort.

CHANCELLOR. But the constitution. We can't touch the constitution.

POMPDEBILE [*starting up*]. We shall destroy the constitution!

CHANCELLOR. The people are clamouring at the gates!

POMPDEBILE. Oh, I forgot them. No, it has been carried too far. We shall have to go on. Proceed.

VIOLETTA. Without the raspberry jam?

POMPDEBILE [*to* KNAVE]. Go you, and procure some. I will give a hundred golden guineas for it.

[*The little boy who holds the cinnamon pot comes forward.*

BOY. Please, your Majesty, I have some.

POMPDEBILE. You! Where?

BOY. In my pocket. If some one would please hold my cinnamon jar—I could get it.

[URSULA *takes it. The boy struggles with his pocket and finally, triumphantly, pulls out a small jar.*

There!

VIOLETTA. How clever of you! Do you always do that?

BOY. What—eat raspberry jam?

VIOLETTA. No, supply the exact article needed from your pocket.

BOY. I eat it for my lunch. Please give me the hundred guineas.

VIOLETTA. Oh, yes—Chancellor—if I may trouble you.

[*Holding out her hand.*

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty, this is an outrage! Are you going to allow this?

POMPDEBILE [*sadly*]. Yes, Chancellor. We have such an impulsive nature!

[*The* LADY VIOLETTA *receives the money.*

VIOLETTA. Thank you. [*She gives it to the boy.*] Now we are ready to begin. Milk, please. [*The boy who holds the milk-jar comes forward and kneels.*] I take some of this milk and beat it well.

YELLOW HOSE [*in a whisper*]. *Beat* it—milk!

VIOLETTA. Then I put in two tablespoonfuls of salt, taking great care that it falls exactly in the middle of the bowl. [*To the little boy*] Thank you, dear. Now the flour, no, the pepper, and then—one pound of butter. I hope that it is good butter, or the whole thing will be quite spoiled.

BLUE HOSE. This is the most astonishing thing I have ever witnessed.

YELLOW HOSE. I don't understand it.

VIOLETTA [*stirring*]. I find that the butter is *not* very good. It makes a great difference. I shall have to use more pepper to counteract it. That's better. [*She pours in pepper. The boy with the pepper-pot sneezes violently.*] Oh, oh, dear! Lend him your handkerchief, Chancellor. Knave, will you? [YELLOW HOSE *silences the boy's sneezes with the* KNAVE'S *handkerchief.*] I think that they are going to turn out very well. Aren't you glad, Chancellor? You shall have one if you will be glad and smile nicely—a little brown tart with raspberry jam in the middle. Now for a dash of vinegar.

COOKS [*in horror*]. Vinegar! Great goslings! Vinegar!

VIOLETTA [*stops stirring*]. Vinegar will make them crumbly. Do you like them crumbly, Pompdebile darling? They are really for you, you know, since I am trying, by this example, to show all the wives how to please all the husbands.

POMPDEBILE. Remember that they are to go in the museum with the tests of the previous Queens.

VIOLETTA [*thoughtfully*]. Oh, yes, I had forgotten that. Under the circumstances, I shall omit the vinegar. We don't want them too crumbly. They would fall about and catch the dust so frightfully. The museum-keeper would never forgive me in years to come. Now I dip them by the spoonful on this pan; fill them with the nice little boy's raspberry jam—I'm sorry I have to use it all, but you may lick the spoon—put them in the oven, slam the door. Now, my Lord Pompy, the fire will do the rest.

[*She curtsies before the* KING.

POMPDEBILE. It gave us great pleasure to see the ease with which you performed your task. You must have been practising for weeks. This relieves, somewhat, the anxiety under which we have been suffering and makes us think that we would enjoy a game of chequers once more. How long a time will it take for your creation to be thoroughly done, so that it may be tested?

VIOLETTA [*considering*]. About twenty minutes, Pompy.

POMPDEBILE [*to* HERALD]. Inform the people. Come, we will retire. [*To* KNAVE] Let no one enter until the Lady Violetta commands.

[*All exit, left, except the* KNAVE. *He stands in deep thought, his chin in hand—then exits slowly, right. The room is empty. The cuckoo-clock strikes. Presently both right and left doors open stealthily. Enter* LADY VIOLETTA *at one door, the* KNAVE *at the other, backward, looking down the passage. They turn suddenly and see each other.*

VIOLETTA [*tearfully*]. Oh, Knave, I can't cook! Anything—anything at all, not even a baked potato.

KNAVE. So I rather concluded, my lady, a few minutes ago.

VIOLETTA [*pleadingly*]. Don't you think it might just happen that they turned out all right? [*Whispering*] Take them out of the oven. Let's look.

KNAVE. That's what I intended to do before you came in. It's possible that a miracle has occurred.

[*He tries the door of the oven.*

VIOLETTA. Look out; it's hot. Here, take my handkerchief.

KNAVE. The gods forbid, my lady.

[*He takes his hat, and, folding it, opens the door and brings out the pan, which he puts on the table softly.*

VIOLETTA [*with a look of horror*]. How queer! They've melted or something. See, they are quite soft and runny. Do you think that they will be good for anything, Knave?

KNAVE. For paste, my lady, perhaps.

VIOLETTA. Oh, dear, isn't it dreadful!

KNAVE. It is.

VIOLETTA [*beginning to cry*]. I don't want to be banished, especially on a mule——

KNAVE. Don't cry, my lady. It's very—upsetting.

VIOLETTA. I would make a delightful queen. The *fêtes* that I would give—under the starlight, with soft music stealing from the shadows, *fêtes* all perfume and deep mystery, where the young—like you and me, Knave—would find the glowing flowers of youth ready to be gathered in all their dewy freshness!

KNAVE. Ah!

VIOLETTA. Those stupid tarts! And wouldn't I make a pretty picture riding on the white palfrey, garlanded with flowers, followed by the cheers of the populace—"Long live Queen Violetta! Long live Queen Violetta!" Those *abominable* tarts!

KNAVE. I am afraid that her ladyship is vain.

VIOLETTA. I am indeed. Isn't it fortunate?

KNAVE. Fortunate?

VIOLETTA. Well, I mean it would be fortunate if I were going to be queen. They get so much flattery. The queens who don't adore it as I do must be bored to death.

Poor things! I'm never so happy as when I am being flattered. It makes me feel all warm and purry. That is another reason why I feel sure I was *made* to be a queen.

KNAVE [*looking ruefully at the pan*]. You will never be queen, my lady, unless we can think of something quickly, some plan——

VIOLETTA. Oh, yes, dear Knave, please think of a plan at once. Banished people, I suppose, have to comb their own hair, put on their shoes, and button themselves up the back. I have never performed these estimable and worthy tasks, Knave. I don't know how; I don't even know how to scent my bath. I haven't the least idea what makes it smell deliciously of violets. I only know that it always *does* smell deliciously of violets because I wish it that way. I should be miserable; save me, Knave, please.

KNAVE. My mind is unhappily a blank, your Majesty.

VIOLETTA. It's very unjust. Indeed, it's unjust! No other queen in the world has to understand cooking; even the Queen of Spades doesn't. Why should the Queen of Hearts, of all people?

KNAVE. Perhaps it is because—I have heard a proverb: 'The way to the heart is through the——"

VIOLETTA [*angrily, stamping her foot*]. Don't repeat that hateful proverb! Nothing can make me more angry. I feel like crying when I hear it, too. Now, see, I'm crying. You made me.

KNAVE. Why does that proverb make you cry, my lady?

VIOLETTA. Oh, because it is such a stupid proverb and so silly, because it's true in most cases, and because—I don't know why.

KNAVE. We are a set of moles here. One might also say that we are a set of mules. How can moles or mules either be expected to understand the point of view of a Bird of Paradise when she——

VIOLETTA. Bird of Paradise! Do you mean me?

KNAVE [*bowing*]. I do, my lady, figuratively speaking.

VIOLETTA [*drying her eyes*]. How very pretty of you! Do you know, I think that you would make a splendid Chancellor.

KNAVE. Her ladyship is vain, as I remarked before.

VIOLETTA [*coldly*]. As I remarked before, how fortunate. Have you anything to suggest—a plan?

KNAVE. If only there were time my wife could teach you. Her figure is squat, round, her nose is clumsy, and her eyes stumble over it; but her cooking, ah!—[*he blows a kiss*] it is a thing to dream about. She cooks as naturally as the angels sing. The delicate flavours of her concoctions float over the palate like the perfumes of a thousand flowers. True, her temper, it is anything but sweet—— However, I am conceded by many to be the most happily married man in the kingdom.

VIOLETTA [*sadly*]. Yes. That's all they care about here. One may be, oh, so cheerful and kind and nice in every other way, but if one can't cook nobody loves one at all.

KNAVE. Beasts! My higher nature cries out at them for holding such views. Fools! Swine! But my lower nature whispers that perhaps after all they are not far from right, and as my lower nature is the only one that ever gets any encouragement——

VIOLETTA. Then you think that there is nothing to be done—I shall have to be banished?

KNAVE. I'm afraid—— Wait, I have an idea! [*Excitedly*] Dulcinea, my wife—her name is Dulcinea—made known to me this morning, very forcibly—— Yes, I remember, I'm sure—— Yes, she was going to bake this very morning some raspberry tarts—a dish in which she particularly excels—— If I could only procure some of them and bring them here!

VIOLETTA. Oh, Knave, dearest, sweetest Knave, could you, I mean, would you? Is there time? The Court will return. [*They tiptoe to the door and listen stealthily.*

KNAVE. I shall run as fast as I can. Don't let anyone come in until I get back, if you can help it.

[*He jumps on the table, ready to go out of the window.*

VIOLETTA. Oh, Knave, how clever of you to think of it! It is the custom for the King to grant a boon to the Queen at her coronation. I shall ask that you be made Chancellor.

KNAVE [*turning back*]. Oh, please don't, my lady, I implore you.

VIOLETTA. Why not?

KNAVE. It would give me social position, my lady, and that I would rather die than possess. Oh, how we argue about that, my wife and I! Dulcinea wishes to climb, and the higher she climbs, the less she cooks. Should you have me made Chancellor she would never wield a spoon again.

VIOLETTA [*pursing her lips*]. But it doesn't seem fair, exactly. Think of how much I shall be indebted to her. If she enjoys social position, I might as well give her some. We have lots and lots of it lying around.

KNAVE. She wouldn't, my lady, she wouldn't enjoy it. Dulcinea is a true genius, you understand, and the happiness of a genius lies solely in using his gift. If she didn't cook she would be miserable, although she might not be aware of it, I'm perfectly sure.

VIOLETTA. Then I shall take all social position away from you. You shall rank below the scullery maids. Do you like that better? Hurry, please.

KNAVE. Thank you, my lady; it will suit me perfectly.

[*He goes out with the tarts.* VIOLETTA *listens anxiously for a minute; then she takes her skirt between the tips of her fingers and practises in pantomime her anticipated ride on the palfrey. She bows, smiles, kisses her hand, until suddenly she remembers the mule standing outside the gates of the palace. That thought saddens her, so she curls up in* POMPDEBILE'S *throne and cries*

softly, wiping away her tears with a lace handkerchief. There is a knock. She flies to the door and holds it shut.

VIOLETTA [*breathlessly*]. Who is there ?

CHANCELLOR. It is I, Lady Violetta. The King wishes to return.

VIOLETTA [*alarmed*]. Return ! Does he ? But the tarts are not done. They are not done at all !

CHANCELLOR. You said they would be ready in twenty minutes. His Majesty is impatient.

VIOLETTA. Did you play a game of chequers with him, Chancellor ?

CHANCELLOR. Yes.

VIOLETTA. And did you beat him ?

CHANCELLOR [*shortly*]. I did not.

VIOLETTA [*laughing*]. How sweet of you ! Would you mind doing it again just for me ? Or would it be too great a strain on you to keep from beating him twice in succession ?

CHANCELLOR. I shall tell the King that you refuse admission.

[VIOLETTA *runs to the window to see if the* KNAVE *is in sight. The* CHANCELLOR *returns and knocks.*

CHANCELLOR. The King wishes to come in.

VIOLETTA. But the chequers !

CHANCELLOR. The Knights of the Chequer-board have taken them away.

VIOLETTA. But the tarts aren't done, really.

CHANCELLOR. You said twenty minutes.

VIOLETTA. No, I didn't—at least, I said twenty minutes for them to get good and warm and another twenty minutes for them to become brown. That makes forty—don't you remember ?

CHANCELLOR. I shall carry your message to his Majesty.

[VIOLETTA *again runs to the window and peers anxiously up the road.*

CHANCELLOR [*knocking loudly*]. The King *commands* you to open the door.

VIOLETTA. Commands ! Tell him—— Is he there—with you ?

CHANCELLOR. His Majesty is at the door.

VIOLETTA. Pompy, I think you are rude, very rude indeed. I don't see how you can be so rude—to command me, your own Violetta, who loves you so. [*She again looks in vain for the* KNAVE.] Oh, dear ! [*Wringing her hands*] Where *can* he be !

POMPDEBILE [*outside*]. This is nonsense. Don't you see how worried we are ? It is a compliment to you——

VIOLETTA. Well, come in ; I don't care—only I'm sure they are not finished.

[*She opens the door for the* KING, *the* CHANCELLOR, *and the two* PASTRY-COOKS. *The* KING *walks to his throne. He finds* LADY VIOLETTA'S *lace handkerchief on it.*

POMPDEBILE [*holding up handkerchief*]. What is this ?

VIOLETTA. Oh, that's my handkerchief !

POMPDEBILE. It is very damp. Can it be that you are anxious, that you are afraid ?

VIOLETTA. How silly, Pompy ! I washed my hands, as one always does after cooking ; [*to the* PASTRY-COOKS] doesn't one ? But there was no towel, so I used my handkerchief instead of my petticoat, which is made of chiffon and is very perishable.

CHANCELLOR. Is the Lady Violetta ready to produce her work ?

VIOLETTA. I don't understand what you mean by work, Chancellor. Oh, the tarts ! [*Nervously*] They were quite simple—quite simple to make—no work at all—— A little imagination is all one needs for such things, just imagination. You agree with me, don't you, Pompy, that imagination will work wonders—will do almost anything, in fact ? I remember——

POMPDEBILE. The pastry-cooks will remove the tarts from the oven.

VIOLETTA. Oh, *no*, Pompy! They are not finished or cooked, or whatever one calls it. They are not. The last five minutes is of the greatest importance. Please don't let them touch them! *Please*——

POMPDEBILE. There, there, my dear Violetta, calm yourself. If you wish, they will put them back again. There can be no harm in looking at them. Come, I will hold your hand.

VIOLETTA. That will help a great deal, Pompy, your holding my hand.

[*She scrambles up on the throne beside the* KING.

CHANCELLOR [*in horror*]. On the throne, your Majesty?

POMPDEBILE. Of course not, Chancellor. We regret that you are not yet entitled to sit on the throne, my dear. In a little while——

VIOLETTA [*coming down*]. Oh, I see. May I sit here, Chancellor, in this seemingly humble position at his feet? Of course, I can't *really* be humble when he is holding my hand and enjoying it so much.

POMPDEBILE. Violetta! [*To the* PASTRY-COOKS] Sample the tarts. This suspense is unbearable!

[*The* KING'S *voice is husky with excitement. The two* PASTRY-COOKS, *after bowing with great ceremony to the* KING, *to each other, to the* CHANCELLOR—*for this is the most important moment of their lives by far—walk to the oven door and open it, impressively. They fall back in astonishment so great that they lose their balance, but they quickly scramble to their feet again.*

YELLOW HOSE. Your Majesty, there are no tarts there!

BLUE HOSE. Your Majesty, the tarts have gone!

VIOLETTA [*clasping her hands*]. Gone! Oh, where could they have gone?

POMPDEBILE [*coming down from throne*]. That is impossible.

PASTRY-COOKS [*greatly excited*]. You see, you see, the oven is empty as a drum.

POMPDEBILE [*to* VIOLETTA]. Did you go out of this room?

VIOLETTA [*wailing*]. Only for a few minutes, Pompy, to powder my nose before the mirror in the pantry. [*To* PASTRY-COOKS] When one cooks one becomes so dishevelled, doesn't one? But if I had thought for one little minute——

POMPDEBILE [*interrupting*]. The tarts have been stolen!

VIOLETTA [*with a shriek, throwing herself on a chair*]. Stolen! Oh, I shall faint; help me. Oh, oh, to think that anyone would take my delicious little, my dear little tarts. My salts. Oh! Oh!

[PASTRY-COOKS *run to the door and call.*

YELLOW HOSE. Salts! Bring the Lady Violetta's salts.

BLUE HOSE. The Lady Violetta has fainted!

[URSULA *enters hurriedly bearing a smelling-bottle.*

URSULA. Here, here—— What has happened? Oh, my lady, my sweet mistress!

POMPDEBILE. Some wretch has stolen the tarts.

[LADY VIOLETTA *moans.*

URSULA. Bring some water. I will take off her headdress and bathe her forehead.

VIOLETTA [*sitting up*]. I feel better now. Where am I? What is the matter? I remember. Oh, my poor tarts!

[*She buries her face in her hands.*

CHANCELLOR [*suspiciously*]. Your Majesty, this is very strange.

URSULA [*excitedly*]. I know, your Majesty. It was the Knave. One of the Queen's women, who was walking in the garden, saw the Knave jump out of this window with a tray in his hand. It was the Knave.

VIOLETTA. Oh, I don't think it was he! I don't, really.

POMPDEBILE. The scoundrel. Of course it was he. We shall banish him for this, or have him *beheaded*.

CHANCELLOR. It should have been done long ago, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. You are right.

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty will never listen to me.

POMPDEBILE. We *do* listen to you. Be quiet.

VIOLETTA. What are you going to do, Pompy dear ?

POMPDEBILE. Herald, issue a proclamation at once. Let it be known all over the kingdom that I desire that the Knave be brought here dead or alive. Send the royal detectives and policemen in every direction.

CHANCELLOR. Excellent ; just what I should have advised had your Majesty listened to me.

POMPDEBILE [*in a rage*]. Be quiet. [*Exit* HERALD.] I never have a brilliant thought but you claim it. It is insufferable ! [*The* HERALDS *can be heard in the distance.*

CHANCELLOR. I resign.

POMPDEBILE. Good. We accept your thirty-eighth resignation at once.

CHANCELLOR. You did me the honour to appoint me as your Chancellor, your Majesty, yet never, never do you give me an opportunity to chancel. That is my only grievance. You must admit, your Majesty, that as your advisers advise you, as your dressers dress you, as your hunters hunt, as your bakers bake, your Chancellor should be allowed to chancel. However, I will be just—as I have been with you so long ; before I leave you, I will give you a month's notice.

POMPDEBILE. That isn't necessary.

CHANCELLOR [*referring to the constitution hanging at his belt*]. It's in the constitution.

POMPDEBILE. Be quiet.

VIOLETTA. Well, I think as things have turned out so—so unfortunately, I shall change my gown. [*To* URSULA] Put out my cloth of silver with the moonstones. It is

always a relief to change one's gown. May I have my handkerchief, Pompy? Rather a pretty one, isn't it, Pompy? Of course, you don't object to my calling you Pompy now. When I'm in trouble it's a comfort, like holding your hand.

POMPDEBILE [*magnanimously*]. You may hold our hand too, Violetta.

VIOLETTA [*fervently*]. Oh, how good you are, how sympathetic! But you see it's impossible just now, as I have to change my gown—unless you will come with me while I change.

CHANCELLOR [*in a voice charged with inexpressible horror*]. Your Majesty!

POMPDEBILE. Be quiet! You have been discharged!

[*He starts to descend, when a* HERALD *bursts through the door in a state of great excitement. He kneels before* POMPDEBILE.

HERALD. We have found him; we have found him, your Majesty. In fact, *I* found him all by myself! He was sitting under the shrubbery eating a tart. I stumbled over one of his legs and fell. "How easy it is to send man and all his pride into the dust," he said, and then—I saw him!

POMPDEBILE. Eating a tart! Eating a tart, did you say? The scoundrel! Bring him here immediately.

[*The* HERALD *rushes out and returns with the* KNAVE, *followed by the six little pages. The* KNAVE *carries a tray of tarts in his hand.*

POMPDEBILE [*almost speechless with rage*]. How dare you—you—you——

KNAVE [*bowing*]. Knave, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. You Knave, you shall be punished for this.

CHANCELLOR. Behead him, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. Yes, behead him at once.

VIOLETTA. Oh, no, Pompy, not that! It is not severe enough.

POMPDEBILE. Not severe enough, to cut off a man's head! Really, Violetta——

VIOLETTA. No, because, you see, when one has been beheaded, one's consciousness that one has been beheaded comes off too. It is inevitable. And then, what does it matter, when one doesn't know? Let us think of something really cruel—really fiendish. I have it—deprive him of social position for the rest of his life—force him to remain a mere knave, for ever.

POMPDEBILE. You are right.

KNAVE. Terrible as this punishment is, I admit that I deserve it, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. What prompted you to commit this dastardly crime?

KNAVE. All my life I have had a craving for tarts of any kind. There is something in my nature that demands tarts—something in my constitution that cries out for them—and I obey my constitution as rigidly as does the Chancellor seek to obey his. I was in the garden reading, as is my habit, when a delicate odour floated to my nostrils, a persuasive odour, a seductive, light brown, flaky odour, an odour so enticing, so suggestive of tarts fit for the *gods* —that I could stand it no longer. It was stronger than I. With one gesture I threw reputation, my chances for future happiness, to the winds, and leaped through the window. The odour led me to the oven; I seized a tart, and, eating it, experienced the one perfect moment of my existence. After having eaten that one tart, my craving for other tarts has disappeared. I shall live with the memory of that first tart before me for ever, or die content, having tasted true perfection.

POMPDEBILE. M-m-m, how extraordinary! Let him be beaten fifteen strokes on the back. Now, Pastry-cooks to the Royal Household, we await your decision!

[*The* COOKS *bow as before; then each selects a tart from the tray on the table, lifts it high, then puts*

it in his mouth. An expression of absolute ecstasy and beatitude comes over their faces. They clasp hands, then fall on each other's necks, weeping.

POMPDEBILE [*impatiently*]. What on earth is the matter ?

YELLOW HOSE. Excuse our emotion. It is because we have at last encountered a true genius, a great master, or rather mistress, of our art. [*They bow to* VIOLETTA.

POMPDEBILE. They are good, then ?

BLUE HOSE [*his eyes to heaven*]. Good ! They are angelic !

POMPDEBILE. Give one of the tarts to us. We would sample it.

[*The* PASTRY-COOKS *hand the tray to the* KING, *who selects a tart and eats it.*

POMPDEBILE [*to* VIOLETTA]. My dear, they are marvels ! marvels ! [*He comes down from the throne and leads* VIOLETTA *up to the dais.*] Your throne, my dear.

VIOLETTA [*sitting down, with a sigh*]. I'm glad it's such a comfortable one.

POMPDEBILE. Knave, we forgive your offence. The temptation was very great. There are things that mere human nature cannot be expected to resist. Another tart, cooks, and yet another !

CHANCELLOR. But, your Majesty, don't eat them all. They must go to the museum with the dishes of the previous Queens of Hearts.

YELLOW HOSE. A museum—those tarts ! As well lock a rose in a money-box !

CHANCELLOR. But the constitution commands it. How else can we commemorate, for future generations, this event ?

KNAVE. An your Majesty please, I will commemorate it in a rhyme.

POMPDEBILE. How can a mere rhyme serve to keep this affair in the minds of the people ?

KNAVE. It is the *only* way to keep it in the minds of the people. No event is truly deathless unless its monument be

built in rhyme. Consider that fall which, though insignificant in itself, became the most famous of all history, because someone happened to put it into rhyme. The crash of it sounded through centuries and will vibrate for generations to come.

VIOLETTA. You mean the fall of the Holy Roman Empire ?

KNAVE. No, madam, I refer to the fall of Humpty Dumpty.

POMPDEBILE. Well, make your rhyme. In the meantime let us celebrate. You may all have one tart. [*The* PASTRY-COOKS *pass the tarts. To* VIOLETTA] Are you willing, dear, to ride the white palfrey garlanded with flowers through the streets of the city ?

VIOLETTA. Willing ! I have been practising for days !

POMPDEBILE. The people, I suppose, are still clamouring at the gates.

VIOLETTA. Oh, yes, they must clamour ! I *want* them to. Herald, tell them that to every man I shall toss a flower, to every woman a shining gold piece, but to the babies I shall throw only kisses, thousands of them, like little winged birds. Kisses and gold and roses ! They will surely love me then !

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty, I protest. Of what possible use to the people——

POMPDEBILE. Be quiet. The Queen may scatter what she pleases.

KNAVE. My rhyme is ready, your Majesty.

POMPDEBILE. Repeat it.

KNAVE.

" The Queen of Hearts
She made some tarts
All on a summer's day.
The Knave of Hearts
He stole those tarts
And took them quite away.

The King of Hearts
Called for those tarts
And beat the Knave full sore.
The Knave of Hearts
Brought back the tarts
And vowed he'd sin no more."

VIOLETTA [*earnestly*]. My dear Knave, how wonderful of you ! You shall be Poet Laureate. A Poet Laureate has no social position, has he ?

KNAVE. It depends, your Majesty, upon whether or not he chooses to be more laureate than poet.

VIOLETTA [*rising, her eyes closed in ecstasy*]. *Your Majesty !* Those words go to my head—like wine !

KNAVE. Long live Pompdebile the Eighth and Queen Violetta ! [*The trumpets sound.*

HERALDS. Make way for Pompdebile the Eighth and Queen *Vi*-oletta !

VIOLETTA [*excitedly*]. *Vee*-oletta, please !

HERALDS. Make way for Pompdebile the Eighth and Queen *Vee*-oletta——

[*The* KING *and* QUEEN *show themselves at the door—and the people can be heard clamouring outside.*

CURTAIN

THE 'OLE IN THE ROAD

By " SEAMARK "

CHARACTERS

The WORKMAN, *in shirt-sleeves and corduroys, spotted red scarf round neck, cut-off clay pipe upside-down in his mouth.*

The DUDE, *evening dress, opera hat slightly on one side, white muffler hanging loose, black cane.*

THE 'OLE IN THE ROAD [1]

SCENE : *A street.*

Poles and trestles—hanging from which is some coarse sacking.

The hole in the road is supposed to be behind the sacking, and is hidden from the audience.

A red lamp hanging from trestles.

A watchman's makeshift hut at side of hole (*but hut is not a necessity*).

A brazier with imitation fire made of ashes and red paper.

The WORKMAN *sits on an upturned tub at side of hole, cooking a bit of bacon on an old fork.*

DUDE. Hullo !

WORKMAN. 'Ullo !

DUDE. I say, how much longer is this wretched hole going to remain here ?

WORKMAN. Why, what's the matter with it, it's a good 'ole, ain't it ?

DUDE. A good hole ? Yes, maybe. But what are you using it for ?

WORKMAN. To get me living out of.

DUDE. Yes, but what I mean—what's it here for ?

WORKMAN. So's the traffic can go round it.

DUDE [*patiently*]. Why—is—it—in—the—road ?

WORKMAN. Where else can you put an 'ole bar in the road ?

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

DUDE. Look here, I've been living in that house over there for twelve months, and this hole has been stuck here all that time. How much longer is it going to be here ?

WORKMAN. You see, 'ow we works it is, once an 'ole's an 'ole, it stays an 'ole.

DUDE. Well, how long has this hole been an 'ole, hole ?

WORKMAN. Couldn't rightly say. Y'see, I only got it three years ago—and it was a fairly good 'ole even then.

DUDE. It was ?

WORKMAN. Yes. Mind you, I've improved it tremendous since I got it. Got that 'ut put up, for instance.

DUDE. Let's get it from a different angle. Who *owns* all these blithering holes ?

WORKMAN. Ah ! That's a different matter. Some's owned by the Border and some by the Officer.

DUDE [*puzzled*]. The Border ? And who's the Border ?

WORKMAN. The Border Trade.

DUDE. Oh, yes—and the Officer ?

WORKMAN. The Officer Works.

DUDE [*laughs*]. Thank you. Well, how much longer is this beastly hole going to stay here ?

WORKMAN. That all depends.

DUDE. Depends on what ?

WORKMAN. Depends on what you might call developments. I've got my eye on an 'ole in Bayswater. Bayswater—straight, guv'nor, that's one of the best 'oles in London. 'Ad my eye on it for years. There's an 'ousemaid on one side and a cook on the other. They gits a *Daily Mail* off the 'ousemaid and a cup of tea off the cook. Every morning. That's a beautiful 'ole, that is. My uncle's in that one.

DUDE. Is that so ? [*Laugh.*] Sort of every modern convenience. And that's in Bayswater, is it ?

WORKMAN. Yes, and you can take it from me, that

'ole stays there as long as the cook and the 'ousemaid. Where they goes the 'ole goes.

DUDE. Oh, so you can *shift* your holes about, can you ?

WORKMAN. Lumme, yes. I 'ad two brothers and a nevvy workin' an 'ole out in 'Ammersmith. Right in the Broadway. But it was a bit difficult for 'em to get at in the mornin's, they all livin' on the Lambeth side of the river. So they brought that 'ole all the way up through the 'Ammersmith Road, through High Street, Ken., to Hyde Park Corner, and there it's been ever since. A very successful 'ole, that's been.

DUDE. It has. And can you tell me—what is that *huge* hole in Piccadilly ?

WORKMAN. Now that—glad you mentioned that. That one ought to be an object lesson to all them with 'oles. A lot of amateurs did that one.

DUDE. What—what happened ?

WORKMAN. That mess-up is the result of a collision between *two* 'oles. And now they're all messing about down there wondering which bit belongs to *who*. Got a cousin in that one.

DUDE. Have you ? This hole business seems to be quite a family affair, doesn't it ?

WORKMAN. That's right, mate. You've got to be born to 'oles. Got to 'ave 'oles in your blood, so to speak, if you're going to be any good at it. Look at Perce, f'r instance.

DUDE. And who is Perce ?

WORKMAN. Brother-in-law. Wife's side. See ? 'Adn't never 'ad no experience at the game. An' look what *he* did !

DUDE. Good Lord, man, I hope it was nothing serious ?

WORKMAN. Serious ! Perce bowed our heads in sorrow and disgrace. We couldn't look at anybody for months.

DUDE. But—what did he do ?

WORKMAN [*sibilantly*]. Perce *lorst* a Guv'ment 'ole.

DUDE. Lost a hole ?

WORKMAN. Lorst it. A Guv'ment 'ole.

DUDE. But how dreadful !

WORKMAN. Ah, you might well say.

DUDE. Tell me about it.

WORKMAN. Every 'ole in London knew about it. We got him an 'ole in Wardour Street—family influence, y'know—we apprentice 'em in Guv'ment 'oles. As nice an' comfortable an 'ole as you could find anywhere in the West End. Right outside the Corner House. He seemed to be doin' very well, too. The 'ole was well looked after, and the last time I saw it——

DUDE. When was that ?

WORKMAN. That was early in nineteen-fourteen. Then the War broke out—but did Perce desert the 'ole ? Not 'im. Went right through the War in that 'ole ; air-raids an' all ; never left it winter or summer.

DUDE. Stout fellow !

WORKMAN. That's what the fambly said. Very proud of Perce we was—*then.*

DUDE. Well ?

WORKMAN. And then Perce got married. Like a silly fool—wouldn't take no advice—must go and spend his 'oneymoon at Southend. See ? Couldn't keep an eye on the 'ole.

DUDE. Well—what happened ?

WORKMAN. When he came back, where was the 'ole ? Not there.

DUDE. Good heavens !

WORKMAN. True as I'm sittin' here. We 'unted 'igh and low. But they never found that 'ole agen. Not *that* one. They found one or two others that had been forgotten for years—you know—the chaps workin' 'em had died like and 'adn't told nobody about the 'ole. But poor old Perce, it nearly finished him. Like a ghost he was, for years.

DUDE. What happened to him eventually ?

WORKMAN. Oh, he got over it gradual. We got him part ownership of an 'ole in Oxford Street—you know, the one that moves up and down from Marble Arch to Oxford Circus, but I doubt if he'll ever get a permanent 'ole agen. Not like this one.

DUDE. Ah—now we're coming to it ! This really is a permanent fixture ?

WORKMAN. Yes, I want my son to take this over when I'm done with it.

DUDE. But tell me, *where* did you get it from ?

WORKMAN. I in'erited it from me father !

DUDE. *What I want to know is*—what was this hole originally *dug* for ?

WORKMAN. I dunno, mate.

DUDE. Was it—pipes ?

WORKMAN. Pipes ? Pipes ? There's no pipes 'ere.

DUDE. Well, what are those ? Those things down there ?

WORKMAN. Where ?

DUDE. Down there !

WORKMAN. Blimey—they look like pipes, don't they ? They *are* pipes.

DUDE. What sort of pipes ? Water-pipes—electric ?

WORKMAN. 'Arf a mo'. I'll 'ave a look. Where's me 'ammer ? Give us a match.

DUDE. Take my lighter.

[*A slight knocking of a hammer on a pipe, and then an explosion.*

WORKMAN. It was a gas-pipe !

CURTAIN

THE OAK SETTLE

By Harold Brighouse

CHARACTERS

Josiah Barton, *an old farmer*
Anne Barton, *his wife*
Frank Chatteris, *a City architect*
Elsie Chatteris, *his wife*
Joe Sykes, *a vanman*

The scene is laid in the kitchen of an old farmhouse.

The time is the present.

This play was produced on April 7, 1911, at the Dalston Theatre, London, with the following cast of characters:

Josiah Barton . . .	E. Bennett
Anne Barton . . .	Theresa Osborne
Frank Chatteris . .	Alfred Osborne
Elsie Chatteris . .	Nina Osborne
Joe Sykes	H. Burrell

THE OAK SETTLE[1]

The scene represents the kitchen of an old farmhouse. At the back is the window, neatly curtained and having in it a cardboard placard, blank to the inside, conveying to the outer world the information that milk is for sale within. There are doors right and left—the left leading inside, the right to a lobby and the garden. There is a table covered with glazed American cloth, a horsehair sofa and several horsehair chairs. On the mantelshelf above the large fireplace are several atrocious pot dogs and at one corner an inkstand and a pen. Below the window is a black oak settle, curiously carved. There are present JOSIAH BARTON *and his wife* ANNE. JOSIAH *is a very old man, still hale, though bent with years. He is dressed in rough grey clothes with a striped collar and black tie.* ANNE, *his wife, is many years his junior —a buxom woman of fifty, of the invincibly healthy country type. Her bloom of health fails to conceal the avarice which is writ large upon her face. Only the most unsophisticated observer could look at this face and grow enthusiastic over the idyllic effects of a country life. It is a midsummer afternoon, but the window is kept unopened. A bundle of dried bracken fern is in the hearth, but from force of habit* JOSIAH'S *chair is drawn up as if to a fire. He sits in it, nodding.* ANNE *is at the opposite side at work upon some sewing. A picture of domestic felicity—until one examines* ANNE'S

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

face. Suddenly JOSIAH *moves, takes a large red handkerchief from the right side-pocket of his coat and waves it as at a fly.* ANNE *looks up.*

ANNE. What's taken you now ?

JOSIAH [*grumblingly*]. It be a wasp. Worriting varmint, coming and disturbing of my sleep of an afternoon. Wonder is how they gets in. Winder's allays closed tight. [*Flicking the handkerchief about.*

ANNE. Stop that, now.

JOSIAH [*surprised, still flicking the handkerchief*]. What be to do, my dear ?

ANNE [*threateningly*]. Stop it, I tell you.

JOSIAH [*with the handkerchief suspended in the air*]. Why ? Bain't I to kill wasp now ?

ANNE. That bain't no wasp. That's a bee.

JOSIAH [*pocketing his handkerchief*]. A bee, is it ? Oh, mustn't kill a bee.

ANNE. It warn't your fault you failed. Destroying of your own money-making property. The idea !

JOSIAH [*apologetically*]. I be fair vexed, Anne. That I be.

ANNE [*getting up and putting her sewing down*]. I'll open door and let un fly out.

JOSIAH. Don't hold un open long. Mustn't have a draught in room. Be outside door open ?

ANNE [*opening the door on the right*]. Yes. But it's too warm to do ye any hurt.

JOSIAH. Draughts be bad, warm or cold.

ANNE [*watching as she holds the door open*]. There he goes. Straight to garden.

JOSIAH. I'm main glad I didn't kill he. Bees spells honey and honey's money. What be that ?

ANNE [*shading her eyes with her hand*]. Barmby's van be coming down lane with Joe Sykes a-driving her.

JOSIAH. Let 'em knock, then.

ANNE. He's getting down, now, with a box. About time they things came, too. Place looks quite bare with what's been sold lately.

JOSIAH. More things from London ?

ANNE. Yes. It 'ull be they as we ordered. [*Speaking to someone without*] Well, Joe Sykes, what be that ? Bring her in.

[*Enter* JOE SYKES, *a carrier's vanman, in corduroys, without coat, carrying a small packing-case on his shoulder. He sets it down, without speaking, and sits on it mopping his brow with a large red handkerchief taken from his trousers pocket, and taking a large yellow delivery sheet from his waistcoat pocket.*

JOE [*inquiringly to* ANNE]. Mrs Anne Barton ?

ANNE. To be sure. You know me well enough, Joe Sykes.

JOE. Aye, for a neighbour. But that bain't good enough when it's a matter o' business.

ANNE. What's taken you, you great fule ? Haven't you been here many a time with cases and suchlike ?

[*Trying to snatch the delivery note.* JOE *calmly shifts it from hand to hand.*

JOE [*to* JOSIAH]. Do you identify this woman ?

JOSIAH [*hand to ear*]. Eh ?

JOE [*louder*]. Be her Mrs Anne Barton ?

[*Jerking his thumb towards* ANNE.

JOSIAH. O' course her be.

JOE [*handing the paper*]. Then you signs here.

ANNE [*snatching it angrily and taking pen and ink from the mantelshelf and signing at the table*]. There !

JOE [*examining signature*]. Pretty writer you be, Mrs Barton.

ANNE. I want none of your impudence now. You'd better be off.

JOE [*rising slowly*]. It's a warm day.

ANNE [*shortly*]. Yes. Good afternoon.

JOE. A warm day. A thirsty day.

ANNE. There's a pump in the yard.

JOE. I wouldn't rob you, mam. It's a saying we have down to the village, mean as a Barton. Don't go for to spoil it, mam, by giving summat away. *Good* day.

[*Exit* JOE.

ANNE [*closing door*]. Brassen piece of impudence.

[*She takes a small crowbar and opens the packing-case, going down on her knees, facing audience.*

JOSIAH. What be in box?

ANNE. It be they jugs we ordered—Toby jugs and warming-pans. Last lot was sold quick.

JOSIAH [*grumblingly*]. Jugs and such bain't worth the trouble. Matter o' a shilling or two.

[ANNE *rises with a pair of jugs which she puts on the mantel. Then she feels on it and finds a Post Office Savings Bank book, which she opens.*

ANNE. You're losing heart, Josiah, that's what it is. See, here's your bank-book. Just cast your eye down that. [JOSIAH *takes it, fingers it reverently and chuckles.*] Ah! That does you good, does it? I thought so.

JOSIAH. It's God's truth you're a wonderful woman, Anne, and I don't care if you do come in for it when I'm in my grave. You merit it for sure.

[ANNE *returns to the case and extracts a warming-pan.*

ANNE. Don't you despise the shillings. It's all good money and the trouble's mine. Bain't yours.

JOSIAH. It's time we sold summat big. Bits o' pots bain't to my taste nohow. That settle in the window there's taking a long time to go off.

ANNE [*propping the warming-pan in the corner by the door on the right*]. No, her bain't neither. Her's not been there above a two-three week and we made five pun' on the last. You can't expect to sell a piece o' furniture every day o'

the week. An old Toby jug's different. [*Getting another out from case*] Ugly things they be, though. I can't see what there is in 'em to make gentlefolks fancy 'em. But there's no telling what they folk will fancy.

JOSIAH. Old! He! he!

ANNE [*indignantly*]. Well, they *look* old, don't they? And if you tell the tale proper about they jugs being left you by your grandfer, they believes them old too and you sells 'em for twice what we pays for 'em. [*Carrying box off*] I'll put rest in t'other room. It don't do to have too many out at once.

[*She goes out left. A motor-horn heard at back.* JOSIAH *hastily conceals the bank-book in his pocket. Re-enter* ANNE.

JOSIAH. What be that? One o' they danged motor-cars?

ANNE [*going to window*]. Yes. It be that for sure.

JOSIAH. Cuss 'em. What do they want coming down a lane like ours with their dust and din when there's a plenty o' wide straight roads that are fit for the likes o' they?

ANNE. They're stopping and reading our sign about milk being fur sale. [*She draws back and watches from behind the curtain.*] Yes. They've stopped now.

JOSIAH. Cuss 'em.

ANNE. Who are you cussing! They're getting out of motor now, two of them, man and woman, they be. Now they're coming up path.

JOSIAH [*muttering*]. Cuss 'em. Disturbing of my sleep.

ANNE [*roughly*]. Hush your row. It's money in your pocket, isn't it, if it's only milk they're after? So much nearer to the pub you're always talking of to end your days in.

JOSIAH [*obstinately*]. Price of a glass of milk bain't worth breaking your rest for.

ANNE. The bee did that, anyhow.

JOSIAH. I'd have dropped off again.

ANNE. Well, who knows? [*Coming from window*] It might be better than that. [*Her eyes wander round the room, fixing on the settle below the window, and an evil look crosses her face.*] They look young, and they're happen fools like all young folks, especially them as goes in motors.

JOSIAH [*looking at settle*]. You mean——

ANNE. Yes, o' course I do. Mind you remember what I told you if I call you in, and don't get mixed in your tale this time.

JOSIAH [*chuckling senilely*]. Oho. That's the game, is it?

ANNE. It might be. There's never no telling.

[*A knock outside the right-hand door. She goes to the door and exit. The murmur of a man's cultured voice is heard for a moment and* ANNE'S *in reply.* JOSIAH'S *hand goes up to his ear, but he fails to hear, and brings it down irritably.* ANNE *holds back the door for the motorists to enter. They are* FRANK CHATTERIS, *a pleasant-looking man of about thirty, and his pretty wife* ELSIE. CHATTERIS *is in tweeds with a cap.* ELSIE *has on a dust-cloak, which reveals a simple summer frock, and a motor veil over her hat. The get-up of both suggests the occasional rather than the professional motorist.* JOSIAH *rises slowly as they come in, and with deferential nod makes his way to the door on the left, leaning on a stick which was by his hand against the chair.*

FRANK. Oh, I say, don't let us disturb you, sir. We only want a glass of milk.

JOSIAH. You bain't disturbing I.

ANNE [*closing the door*]. It's all right, sir. It's not for the likes of him to sit in the same room with the quality.

FRANK [*humouring her—gravely*]. I see.

[*Exit* JOSIAH *left.*

ANNE. Milk you said, sir, wasn't it ?

FRANK. Yes, please.

ANNE [*following* JOSIAH]. Yes, sir.

FRANK. Oh, I say, you haven't any soda, have you ?

ANNE [*stopping*]. Oh, yes, sir.

FRANK [*to* ELSIE]. Will you ?

ELSIE. Yes. I'd rather have soda.

FRANK. Make it soda and milk then, will you ?

ANNE. Yes, sir. Just a minute, sir. [*Exit left.*

FRANK. Did you hear that, Elsie ? We're the quality. Not much Socialism about these parts. The quality ! Good Lord !

ELSIE [*looking round*]. Oh, Frank, what a perfect room !

FRANK [*following suit*]. Yes. Jolly little place, isn't it ?

ELSIE. Little ! It's like a palace, after our stuffy flat.

FRANK [*dubiously*]. Um. I prefer the flat.

ELSIE [*pouting*]. Oh, do enthuse.

FRANK. Can't when I'm thirsty.

ELSIE. So am I. I *am* glad you noticed that sign.

FRANK. Yes. [*The pop of a soda-water bottle opening is heard.*] That sounds like business.

ELSIE. Did you notice the woman, Frank ?

FRANK. Not particularly. Why ?

ELSIE. I'll tell you in a moment. Here she is.

[*Enter* ANNE *from the left, with two large glasses containing soda and milk on a tray, which she puts on the table.*

ANNE. Won't you sit down, mam ?

ELSIE [*sitting and taking off her glove*]. Thanks.

FRANK [*sitting and taking up a glass*]. That's what you might call a long drink, isn't it ? [*Drinking.*

ELSIE. I'm going to sip mine quietly and take my time over it, if I may ? [*Looking at* ANNE.

ANNE [*with some show of cordiality*]. Ye stay as long as you're a mind, mam. Best not to hurry yourself over milk, though soda do lighten it to be sure. [ANNE *turns to go.*

ELSIE. Thank you.

FRANK [*putting his hand to his pocket*]. Oh——

[*Exit* ANNE *left.*

ELSIE. She'll be coming back for it. Did you notice her that time ?

FRANK. I had a look.

ELSIE. Isn't she sweet with her nice, fresh face ? I wonder if my complexion will be anything like hers when I'm her age ?

FRANK. I thought she looked a bit hard.

ELSIE. Oh, Frank, how can you ? I'm sure she's a dear. Do you know what she made me think of ?

FRANK [*sipping*]. No. What was it ?

ELSIE. The country, Frank. That woman's face—so unlike the tired, jaded faces of the women one meets in town—this room—our ride through the green lanes—— Oh, how different it all is from our artificial, closed-up life, boxed in amongst everlasting rows of houses. Life in the country must be one continual dream of delight.

FRANK. Think so, little woman ? Do you know, I expect you'd be bored to death in a month. It's not much sport sitting down watching vegetables grow, and there isn't even that violent form of dissipation in the winter.

ELSIE. Oh, how literal you are ! I didn't say I wanted you to be a farmer. No. We could hunt and have house-parties——

FRANK. And generally live up to ten thousand a year when we've got five hundred. And all this because I get a day off from the City and brought you out for a run in a hired motor to blow the cobwebs away.

ELSIE. And I'm grateful for it, Frank. It does us good sometimes to be taken out of ourselves, to come back, if it's only for a day, to the simple life of the country. To see these happy smiling faces with simplicity and content written upon them—oh, it makes me feel a beast when I remember all I have and how little they have.

FRANK. A minute ago you were envying them this room. Anyhow, I shouldn't let it upset me. I daresay they do very well. I've a notion that woman is not the sort to want much.

ELSIE. Yes. It's—oh, it's silly of me to go on like this. To-day, too, our red-letter day. The anniversary of our wedding, Frank. Forgive me. I'll try not to be silly again.

FRANK. Cheer up. Have a drink of milk.

ELSIE. You old goose.

[*She drinks.* FRANK *rises with a little caress and strolls round the room.*

FRANK. You know, much as I prefer the flat for living in, as an architect I can't help taking a sort of professional interest in this old room. By Jove, we don't build like this nowadays.

ELSIE [*watching him as he examines the window*]. What's that under the window ?

FRANK [*putting his hand on it*]. This thing ?

ELSIE. Yes.

FRANK. Oh, it's one of those old settles. [*Sitting on it*] Beastly hard it is, too. Our ancestors had some funny notions of comfort.

ELSIE [*rising and going to it*]. What a quaint old thing !

FRANK [*getting up and inspecting*]. Finely carved, isn't it ?

ELSIE [*enthusiastically*]. It's beautiful. Oh, Frank, wouldn't it look just too lovely for words in our flat ?

FRANK [*dubiously*]. I'm sure I don't know. Where on earth would you find room for it ?

ELSIE. In the hall, of course. We've been wanting a chair there badly, and that beautiful old settle would be just the right thing.

FRANK. Umph !

ELSIE. What are you umphing about ?

FRANK [*quizzically*]. Covetous ?

ELSIE [*brazenly*]. Yes, I am. I would love to have it.

FRANK. My dear girl, that old thing and our modern flat wouldn't go very well together.

ELSIE. Lots of people have them.

FRANK. Oh, I dare say. I can't afford old furniture. Besides, it would be so out of place in the flat, where everything's aggressively new. Here it's—oh, it's in the picture. It fits in. It might have grown where it is.

ELSIE [*sighing*]. Yes, I suppose you're right.

[*She returns disappointedly to her milk.* FRANK *goes on examining the left wall.* ELSIE *looks at him ; he is too interested to notice. She shrugs her shoulders. He continues interested.*

ELSIE. Frank !

FRANK [*casually, still busy with the wall*]. Yes, dear.

ELSIE. Frank, come here !

[*He leaves the wall with regret.*

FRANK. Yes ?

ELSIE. Sit down and listen to me.

FRANK [*sitting*]. Delighted.

ELSIE. No, you're not. You much prefer staring at that silly old wall to gratifying your pretty wife. Now, you know what we had fixed to do to-night ?

FRANK. Dine at home and have a cosy evening together —wasn't that it ?

ELSIE. Yes, and discuss what you are to give me for a wedding-present—well, a wedding anniversary present.

FRANK. Yes, that's all right.

ELSIE. You've not forgotten and bought me anything ?

FRANK. Oh, no ! I remembered the bond.

ELSIE. Well, let's do it now instead.

FRANK. Do what ?

ELSIE. Discuss the present.

FRANK. All right. [*Bending forward and putting his hands together*] I'll tell you what I thought. I spotted

a ripping pendant in Regent Street the other day. I want you to see it, and then if we can run to it——

ELSIE. Extravagant boy! No. Buy me that settle.

FRANK. What!

ELSIE. I'd like a real souvenir of to-day, Frank; something I could look at to remind me always of what we've done and the places we've been in to-day. It's been a great day that you have given me. You don't know how much I've looked forward to this holiday and how much I've enjoyed it. And that settle—well, it fascinates me.

FRANK. But, my dear girl, it's not on sale. It's simply a piece of furniture in a private house.

ELSIE. Ask the woman when she comes if she's not ready to sell.

FRANK. Well, but—I don't know anything about old furniture. Some of it's awfully valuable.

ELSIE. Probably they haven't the faintest idea of its value.

FRANK. I haven't myself, for the matter of that. And the thing may have a sentimental value as a family heirloom. It's a bit different from this stuff [*indicating the horsehair sofa*]. And they'd need to be pretty blind if they can't see the difference.

ELSIE. But just think of what wonderful bargains one hears of people picking up in out-of-the-way cottages.

FRANK. I dare say. They're experts.

ELSIE. Not always. And you're never certain about old furniture bought in town. They can imitate the real thing so well nowadays. There's no question about the genuineness of a settle we drop across by chance in an old house like this.

FRANK. That's true enough.

ELSIE. Yes. And we could take it back with us on the motor and save carriage.

FRANK. No. I'm hanged if we could. In for a penny, in for a pound. I'm not a carrier yet. Besides, the chances

are I shall only offend the old lady if I mention the thing, and I don't know how to set about it anyhow.

ELSIE [*reproachfully*]. Frank !

FRANK. What's the matter ?

ELSIE [*with exaggerated pathos*]. Am I to plead to you, to-day of all days ?

FRANK. No. It's your call, partner. [*Going to the settle again*] You know, I'm not at all sure that we shall be able to open our hall door with this in it.

ELSIE [*turning towards him*]. Well, if it is too big we can sell it and make a profit.

FRANK [*smiling indulgently*]. What a mercenary person you are !

ELSIE. Well, I don't see why we should throw away a chance of turning an honest penny, if we can't find room for it. We're not that rich. I am only being practical and businesslike. Women go into all sorts of business, don't they ?

FRANK [*amused*]. Oh, yes !

ELSIE. Yes. Then why should you sit on me because I've an eye to the main chance ? I want to prove that I'm not quite useless to you.

FRANK. What do you suppose the thing's worth ?

ELSIE. How much were you going to spend on the pendant you saw ?

FRANK. Oh, I don't know. Something like twenty pounds, I suppose.

ELSIE. Well, don't go above that for the settle.

FRANK. I'm to do the talking, then ?

ELSIE. Of course.

FRANK [*going towards door on the left*]. I wonder where the woman is ? [*Looking back*] You know, I had rather set my heart on getting you that pendant.

ELSIE. Frank !

FRANK [*knocking on door*]. All right, dear.

[*He retires from door. Enter* ANNE.

ANNE. Did you knock, sir ?

FRANK. I—— Yes.

ANNE. Is it the milk ? [*Looking*] Why, you've not finished it !

ELSIE. Oh, but it's very nice. I'm quite enjoying it.
[*Sipping.*

FRANK [*awkwardly*]. The fact is, Mrs—er—— I don't know your name.

ANNE. Barton, sir. Yes, sir ?

FRANK. Oh, yes. The fact is we—that is—my wife—er—we've been taking the liberty of looking round your room.

ELSIE [*coming to the rescue*]. And what a sweet room it is, Mrs Barton ! I should think you must love to live in a place like this.

ANNE. Bain't so bad. [*A pause.*

FRANK. No—er—— [*Desperately*] That's an oldish piece of furniture you've got there.
[ANNE'S *eyes wander vacantly.*

FRANK [*impatiently*]. Under the window.

ANNE. Oh ! That.

FRANK. Yes. I wonder now what a thing like that would be worth ?

ANNE. I can't say as I can tell, sir.

FRANK. No. [*Off-handedly*] Probably not much.

ANNE. Oh, but 'tis. Terrible old that be, sir.

FRANK. Indeed.

ANNE. Yes, sir. You see, sir, my husband, octo-geranium he is—older than me this many year—it came to him when his father died—been in the family years upon years, sir—regular *h*eirloom, as you might say.

FRANK. I see. [*Looks at* ELSIE.

ELSIE. I suppose you wouldn't care to sell it, Mrs Barton ?

ANNE [*feigning great surprise*]. Sell that settle, mam ?

ELSIE. Yes. I've taken quite a fancy to it.

ANNE [*dubiously*]. Well, it's not for sale.

ELSIE. Oh, but surely you——

ANNE [*curtly*]. It's not for sale.

FRANK [*to* ELSIE]. That's off, then.

ELSIE [*motioning him to keep quiet—to* ANNE *persuasively*]. We would pay you a good price, Mrs Barton.

FRANK [*to* ELSIE—*impatiently*]. Oh, if she doesn't want to sell, what's the good of going on ?

ELSIE. Be quiet, Frank. [*To* ANNE] I suppose, Mrs Barton, that it's a matter your husband would have to decide ?

ANNE [*gloomily*]. He wouldn't sell, mam, not if you was to go on your bended knees to him for it.

ELSIE. But don't you think he'd consider it, now, if you had a little talk with him first and told him we were ready to pay him a good price ?

ANNE. It bain't no use, mam. He do love that bit of furniture so well as a child or a horse.

FRANK. Yes. I don't think we ought to ask the old gentleman to sell if he's so much attached to it. [*Touching* ELSIE] Come along, Elsie. You can see that Mrs Barton doesn't even care to mention it to her husband.

ANNE [*graciously*]. I might mention it, sir. No harm in that, only——

ELSIE. Yes, of course you will. I'm sure you don't use it. That sofa is far more comfortable.

ANNE. Use it ? Well, no, we don't use it to sit on. But he'd miss it, do you see ? It's been in the family so long too, but I'll just mention it to him, to oblige you, mam.

ELSIE. Thanks very much.

ANNE. Yes. I'll see what he says. [*Exit* ANNE *left.*

ELSIE [*triumphantly*]. You see, I've done it after all.

FRANK. I bet you a pair of gloves he refuses point-blank. Either that, or asks some fancy price to choke us off. You might as well have dropped it at once.

ELSIE. Now, Frank, just leave this to me. I'll show you what a capable business woman you married.

FRANK. You've hidden your light under a bushel so far.

ELSIE. Just you wait. People in the country don't see much money. I expect they'll be tempted very easily.

[*Enter left* ANNE *and* JOSIAH. ANNE *leads him towards his chair.*

ANNE. It's the old settle, Josiah.

JOSIAH [*vacantly*]. Eh ?

ANNE [*settling him in his chair*]. Do you mind if he sits down, mam ? It's his rheumatics. Scrutinizing pains, he has. [JOSIAH *sits.*] The lady wants you to sell her the settle, Josiah.

JOSIAH [*shaking his head*]. Sell my settle ?

ELSIE. Yes. What do you say, Mr Barton ?

JOSIAH. Sell my settle ? No, no, no.

ANNE [*persuasively*]. It bain't no use to us, Josiah.

JOSIAH. Use ? No, happen it's not. The room wouldn't look itself without it, though.

FRANK [*as if tired of the discussion, briskly*]. Look here, sir, I'll give you a five-pound note for it.

JOSIAH [*with determination, nudged by* ANNE, *who stands by his chair*]. I won't part, sir.

FRANK. Eight pounds.

JOSIAH. No.

FRANK [*turning away*]. Oh, all right.

ELSIE. Eight pounds is a lot of money, Mr Barton. Think what you could do with eight pounds.

ANNE. Yes. You could buy that milking cow you were after for that.

JOSIAH [*testily*]. No, I couldn't neither. He won't sell under ten. [ELSIE *looks appealingly at* FRANK.

FRANK. I'll give ten.

JOSIAH. 'Tain't no use, sir. I wouldn't part with that settle not for twenty pound, I wouldn't. It's not only

because it's been there so long and come down to me from my father.

ELSIE. What other reason is there ?

JOSIAH. Well, you see, there was a gentleman come here a while back as admired that settle powerful. Told we as Queen Anne weren't dead when that was made and as how it was worth more then he was, and he'd a gold watch-chain same as you, sir. I'm not short of money, sir. Maybe I'm not much to look at, but that settle's not for sale, thanking ye kindly for your offer, sir.

ELSIE [*to* FRANK]. It is valuable, then. I told you so. Queen Anne period things always are. We could send it to Christie's and get no end of money for it.

FRANK. All right. I'll go the limit. [*To* JOSIAH] Look here, Mr Barton, I'll give you twenty pounds for it and write you a cheque before I leave the room. That's my best offer. Take it or leave it.

JOSIAH [*nudged by* ANNE]. Well, sir——

ANNE. Do 'ee now, Josiah, do 'ee take it. It's a lot of money as the gentleman offers you, and the old thing do need a power of elbow grease to keep her bright.

JOSIAH. It's a bargain, sir.

FRANK. Very well. [*Takes a cheque-book from his pocket*] Can I trouble you for ink, Mrs Barton ?

ANNE [*taking the inkstand from the mantelshelf*]. Surely, sir.

FRANK [*sitting down and writing at the table*]. Twenty pounds. [*Handing the cheque*] There you are. You see my name. I'll send for it to-morrow—er—perhaps you'd better let me have a receipt.

ANNE. Yes, sir. I'll write it.

[*Takes several sheets of paper from the mantle, sits at table and writes.*

FRANK [*taking a pocket-book out*]. Here's a stamp.

ANNE. Thank you, sir. The fifteenth to-day, isn't it ?

FRANK. Yes, fifteenth.

ANNE [*handing receipt to him*]. Will that do ?

FRANK [*reading it, folding and putting it in his pocket-book*]. Admirably. Why, you're quite a business woman, Mrs Barton.

ANNE. I have to be, sir. You see [*indicating* JOSIAH], he's getting a bit beyond it now.

FRANK. I see. Well, I think we'd better be moving, hadn't we, Elsie ?

ELSIE. All right, dear. Good-bye, Mrs Barton. Good-bye. [*Moving to* JOSIAH.

ANNE [*curtsying*]. Good day, mam.

FRANK. Good day.

[*Exit* FRANK *and* ELSIE *on the right.* ANNE *holds the door open for them and closes it. Then she goes to the window and looks out. The horn hoots.* JOSIAH *breaks into a senile chuckle.*

ANNE [*returning from the window*]. You may well smile.

JOSIAH. Hee, hee, hee. [ANNE *sits at table.*] What be doing ?

ANNE. Best lose no time about getting another.

JOSIAH. You never know your luck.

ANNE. No. Fifteen pounds nearer that pub of yours. Not bad for one afternoon. Now. [*Squaring up to write*] " Messrs Smith and Jones, City Road, London, E.C. Kindly send another imitation Queen Anne period oak settle, list number——" What's the number, Josiah ? Best have same again. Oh, I know—" number 343*a* as last had, price £5 net, carriage paid to Josiah Barton——"

[*She breaks off and gets up suddenly, all her smiles gone.*

JOSIAH [*interrupting his chuckling*]. What be to do with ye ?

ANNE. The thieves !

JOSIAH. Thieves ? Who be ye a-calling ugly names ?

ANNE. Them.

JOSIAH. What be stolen ?

ANNE. They've gone off without paying for the milk.

JOSIAH. What!

ANNE. It's true!

JOSIAH. Cuss 'em. Cuss 'em. Them motors never brought luck to no one. Noise and dust, and now they come and eat honest folks out of house and home and go off cool and easy without so much as offering to pay for what they've had. Cuss 'em.

ANNE. The thieves. The dirty thieves.

[*She remains standing staring with a malevolent glare straight before her.*

CURTAIN

SHIVERING SHOCKS

OR, THE HIDING-PLACE

A PLAY FOR BOYS

By CLEMENCE DANE

CHARACTERS

(*in the order of their appearance*)

CAPTAIN DALLAS, V.C., D.S.O.
KYSH, *his servant*
GRANVILLE HUGHES, B.SC., *an inventor*
DAWSON
"THE SHEPHERD" } *crooks*
INSPECTOR JAMES POLLOCK, *alias* "ROWLEY"

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE following playlet was written at the request of a dramatic society of schoolboys. They provided the plot, or, rather, the ingredients. They demanded :

A hero crippled in the War.
Crooks.
An inventor who " shall invent something that the crooks are after."
At least two stage-fights.
Pistols, if possible.
A detective.
A Cockney accent.
An Irish accent.
No women or love-making.
A drunken man who stammers.

In endeavouring to satisfy these serious requirements the following ' tremendous trifle ' came into being.

CLEMENCE DANE

SHIVERING SHOCKS[1]

SCENE : *A small, comfortable-looking cottage sitting-room. At the back is a window, with heavy curtains, looking out on a snowy lawn. On the right is a curtained outer door. On the left at the back is a small door opening on a passage and a hearth with a fire burning low. Between the hearth and a small table is a big invalid's chair, with arm-rests and cushions. In it lies* CAPTAIN ROBERT DALLAS, *clean-shaven, bronzed, still young in expression, though his hair is going grey. He is broad-chested, with powerful shoulders and big hands. His legs are hidden by a striped rug. He is reading by the light of a small electric lamp placed on the mantelpiece behind him. The other bulbs, hanging from the ceiling, are unlighted.*

TIME : *A winter's evening.*

As he turns a page there is a gentle knock.

DALLAS [*not looking up*]. Come in.

[*The door opens and* KYSH *enters, carrying a tray with a glass, a bottle of whisky, and a soda-siphon. He is about* DALLAS'S *age, small and wiry, and carries himself like a man who has been in the Army. He has bright, twinkling eyes and a blustering, self-important manner, always at war with his obvious respect for his*

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York

master. He speaks with a strong Cockney accent. He draws the small table closer to the chair and a little behind it, and puts down the tray. Then, as DALLAS *does not look up, he coughs.*

Eh ?

KYSH. Anything more this evening, sir ?

DALLAS [*reading*]. No, I think not. At least, not for half an hour or so.

[KYSH *coughs again.* DALLAS *looks up.* Don't cough all over me like that, Kysh. I'm not a jujube. What's the matter ?

KYSH. My evenin' out, sir.

DALLAS. Well, trot along !

KYSH. I wanted to be sure you 'ad everything requisite——

DALLAS. I can ring for Mrs Polson.

KYSH. If you rekilect, sir, you kindly give Mrs Polson permission to be out too, sir.

DALLAS. Oh, yes, I remember. A funeral, wasn't it ?

KYSH. Yes, sir, this afternoon. A' aunt. As she said, sir, she don't 'ave many relaxations. It's a quiet life, sir, ten miles from nowhere, so to speak—except for Mr Hughes across the way—and 'e 'as 'is stinks to amuse 'isself with. But Mrs Polson, she finds it as quiet as—as I dessay you do, sir.

DALLAS. A lame duck must stay where Providence dumps him, Kysh.

KYSH. If you call a Hun whizzbang "Providence," sir—well, I calls it blarsphemy.

DALLAS. Now, Kysh !

KYSH. Sorry, sir.

DALLAS. Besides, I meant—all this. [*He gestures to the room.*] It's snug, if it is a lonely neighbourhood.

KYSH. A Gawd-forsaken 'ole wivout a cinema——

DALLAS. Well, you must blame my aunt, Kysh. She left it me.

KYSH. Ah, you 'ad a' aunt too, sir. Yes, they come in handy at times. Good night, sir!

DALLAS. Enjoy yourself!

KYSH. You bet, sir! [*He goes to the door.*] Thank you, sir.

[*He goes out whistling the "Dead March in Saul" very cheerfully. As* DALLAS *takes up his book again, smiling, the telephone bell rings.*

DALLAS [*shouting*]. Kysh! [KYSH *comes back.*] Answer it, will you? Lucky you're still here.

KYSH [*at the 'phone*]. 'Ullo! 'Ullo! Yes. This is Captain Dallas's. No, it ain't the Captain—speakin' for 'im. No, 'e can't come 'isself. Why not? [*Irritably*] 'Cause, if you must know, 'e lost the use of 'is legs in a blow-up in the War—same time 'e found 'is V.C. See?

DALLAS. Now, Kysh, don't be a fool!

KYSH. Sorry, sir! What? No, and I can't bring the receiver to 'im, because they won't put us on a cord. Why won't they? Ask Kellaway!

DALLAS [*impatiently*]. Take the message, Kysh—take the message!

KYSH. 'Ere, 'old on! Shall I take a message? What? What? Orl right, then. Go to——! [*He checks himself and slams down the receiver, then turns, much injured, to* DALLAS.] Says 'e can't trust the rest of the message to no one but yourself, sir. 'Aven't I been with you ten years?

DALLAS. Look here, Kysh, if you make an ass of yourself I won't take my medicine.

KYSH. Sorry, sir!

DALLAS. You've done it, anyway—ringing off like that. Who were they?

KYSH. Police-station, sir.

DALLAS. What in the name of thunder do the police want with me?

KYSH. That's just what they wouldn't tell me, sir. Brasted—— Sorry, sir !

DALLAS. What did they say ?

KYSH. That if Mr Hughes come over, would you kindly tell 'im their man 'ad started.

DALLAS. Well, you'd better ring up Mr Hughes and pass it on. He's not likely to be round a snowy day like this.

KYSH. Right, sir ! [*He takes up the receiver.*] 'Ullo ! Gi'me Hoe 37. Hoe ! H for 'ell. That's it !

DALLAS. I wonder why they didn't ring him up direct.

KYSH. They said 'is number was engaged, sir.

DALLAS. I thought he was going up to town this week ?

KYSH. Oh, 'e did, sir. But 'e come back yesterday. I understand 'e's going away again, sir.

DALLAS. Oh !

KYSH [*into the 'phone*]. I say, can't you get me 37 ? [*To* DALLAS] Yes, sir ! Saw old Rowley in the village this morning, an' 'e told me 'is cab 'ad been ordered for to-night.

DALLAS. Is old Rowley about again ? Thought he'd drunk himself into the workhouse long ago.

KYSH. Well, I was surprised to see 'im. All wrapped up, 'e was, and didn't 'ardly seem to know me. [*Into the 'phone*] I say, *can't* you get me that—— What ? Oh ! Oh, *orl* right ! [*He hangs up the receiver.*] Line out of order. They think it's the snow. Shall I wait a bit, sir, and try again ?

DALLAS. No, no, Kysh. It may be wrong for days. You get off.

KYSH. Thank you, sir ! [*He goes out.*

DALLAS [*looking after him*]. Good old Kysh ! [*He settles himself anew, opens his book, pulls out his cigarette-case and takes a cigarette, and is about to light it when he changes his mind, lays it down, and stretches out his hand to the bottle of whisky. He pours out a little, then holds*

it up to the light, frowns, and calls.] Kysh! Kysh, you old owl, the bottle's nearly empty. Kysh! [*A door bangs in the distance.*] Blow! Oh, well, I must spin it out. [*He adds some soda-water, and is about to drink when there sounds a tap at the window.*] Hallo! What's that? [*The window is thrown up.*] Who's that? Who the devil—Hughes! [*A man clambers over the sill, stumbles into the room, and turns instantly to draw the heavy curtains together. He stands holding himself upright by them as if he were utterly exhausted.*] Lord, man, I thought it was a burglar. Why can't you come in by the door like a Christian? You know the trick of the handle. [*Suddenly realizing that something is wrong*] Why, Hughes, old man—what is it?

HUGHES [*he is a thin, spectacled, pleasant-faced creature, with nervous gestures and untidy hair thatching a big forehead. He speaks in breathless jerks, very quickly, glancing behind him as he does so, obviously unnerved*]. They were watching the door. I saw Kysh go out just now. He drew 'em off for a moment. That gave me my chance. I've been skulking in the woods all day, dodging 'em. [*He comes towards* DALLAS; *then, seeing the siphon, etc.*] Ah, that's what I want! I'm chilled to the bone. [*He drinks off* DALLAS'S *untouched glass.*] Ah, that's better! Sorry I startled you. I—I—— [*He drinks again.*] You—you see—it's been a pretty strenuous twenty-four hours. They've been dogging me for days, and last night, when I found the wires cut—— [*Then, hysterically*] I say, do you think I've done it? Do you think I've diddled 'em? Hey, diddle, diddle, eh? Hey, diddle——

DALLAS [*soothing him*]. Look here, old thing, hadn't you better sit down and tell me all about it?

HUGHES [*half seating himself*]. Yes, yes, you're right, Dallas! I'll tell you—— Hark!

[*He tiptoes to the window and peers between the join of the curtains, listening.*

DALLAS. Anyone there ?

HUGHES. No, all quiet. [*With a long-drawn breath of relief*] With any luck they've missed me. [*Then, half to himself*] If I could only get back unseen—the way I came —it would do the trick. Through the laurels—yes—that's the way.

DALLAS [*sharply*]. Hughes ! [*Then, as* HUGHES *goes on talking to himself, in a parade voice*] Hughes !

HUGHES [*jumping*]. Eh ?

DALLAS. No more nonsense, now ! Pull yourself together, even if you are a scientific genius. What's the trouble ? What's been happening ? Why are you bolting through windows like a scared rabbit ? Why do the police send you mysterious messages by me ?

HUGHES. What's that ? What about a message ?

DALLAS. I was to tell Mr Hughes that their man was on the way.

HUGHES. Pollock—on the way, is he ? Thank God !

[*He leans back with a look of relief.*

DALLAS. That's all very well for you, you know—breaking up my happy home and drinking up my last drop of whisky and thanking God and gibbering ; but where do I come in ? You know I can't get up and shake sense into you.

HUGHES [*he has got back his self-control*]. I say, Dallas —I'm awfully sorry. But I—I'm a man of peace, you know—and I've had rather a dose—didn't mean to make such an ass of myself.

DALLAS. Cut the cackle, old man ! What's up ?

HUGHES [*pulling closer, confidentially*]. You know what I've been working at the last year ?

DALLAS. The new explosive ?

HUGHES [*glancing hastily round him*]. That's it ! [*Kindling*] Man, I tell you, it's the last word—the greatest thing since Roger Bacon blew himself up with his own gunpowder. It's going to abolish war. It's going to

revolutionize creation. The country that owns my formula can crumple up the armies of the earth like a gardener spraying green-fly. And simple—simple as making toffee! And almost as cheap. The War Office has gone mad over it. I saw the Prime Minister yesterday. They'll give me anything I like to ask for it—[*with a change of tone*]—in theory.

DALLAS. Good for you, old man!

HUGHES [*grimly*]. Sounds all right, doesn't it? And yet—the fools—they wouldn't give me the one thing I did ask of 'em.

DALLAS. And that's——

HUGHES. Silence.

DALLAS. Do you mean there's been a leakage?

HUGHES. Not my end, that I'll swear. I've not opened my mouth to a living soul. You know I tell you most things, but—I swear to you, Dallas, I've been afraid of the flies on the wall—of my own shadow on the ground. And yet——

DALLAS. Well?

HUGHES. I was twice jostled and my pockets picked on the way up. I was attacked in the carriage coming down; but there was a cord in the compartment, fortunately, and the brute jumped from the train as I pulled it—and got away. When I got home they'd been there before me. The place was ransacked.

DALLAS. But they didn't find the formula?

HUGHES. It doesn't exist.

DALLAS. What?

HUGHES. Not on paper. I'm not such a fool. But I know it by heart. That's the whole point. That's why I'm so scared of getting knocked out. You thought I was in a funk. Well, so I was—so I am—but not in the way you thought. You see, I'm not a fighting man like you, Dallas—I'm C3 and all that, I know, but—well, I've worked for England in my own way,

and I'm hanged if she's going to lose what I've got to give her.

DALLAS. Well, there are two of us now, old thing.

HUGHES. Yes, and Pollock's on the way.

DALLAS. Pollock ?

HUGHES. Inspector Pollock—the man the Yard promised me. Their best man. I 'phoned them at once, you see, and he spoke himself—began giving me instructions—password, and so on——

DALLAS. Password ?

HUGHES. So that I'd know him, as he put it, "in any company." He asked what was the nearest house and if you were reliable, and then in the middle of a sentence—cut off ! They'd cut the wires, of course.

DALLAS. That accounts for the message to me.

HUGHES. Thank God there's brains at that end. It's a question of hanging on till he gets here. But I confess —alone in that house, barricaded in my study—I—I got the wind up.

DALLAS. I wonder they didn't try to rush you.

HUGHES. They wanted me to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for 'em. They thought the formula was hidden in the house and I'd come back for it—obviously.

DALLAS. So if they've spotted that you've done a bolt——

HUGHES. They'll be convinced the paper's on me. That's why I want to get back, if I can, unseen. That reminds me—give me a pencil.

[*He draws a pencil from his pocket and scribbles.*

DALLAS [*watching him*]. I suppose that paper's worth a million pounds a letter.

HUGHES. A million lives a letter—besides ours, Dallas. There ! [*He hands it over to* DALLAS.] Now, if they get me, that goes to the War Office with my love, eh ?

DALLAS. I'm a lame dog, Hughes, but I promise you this—if the War Office doesn't get it, no one else shall.

HUGHES. Good enough! Well, I'm off to diddle 'em—with any luck. But God help you, Dallas, if they guess you've got it here!

DALLAS. They? Is it Germany?

HUGHES [*with an ugly laugh*]. Farther east, my boy. Farther east!

DALLAS. Not—— [HUGHES *leans over his shoulder and whispers.*] You don't mean it.

HUGHES. Very much I do! Well—so long! [*As he turns to the window a shot rings out that shatters the bulb of the lamp. In the dull glow of the fire a dark figure is seen to part the curtains and leap upon* HUGHES. *There is a shout from him; the noise of two men struggling; then*] Dallas! Dallas! A light! Strike a light! [*Then* HUGHES'S *voice screaming*] Aaah!

[*A man's figure disappears through the window.*

DALLAS [*as he gets the candle alight*]. Hughes! Are you hurt?

HUGHES [*staggering towards the window*]. Got away!

DALLAS. Did you hit——

HUGHES [*swaying*]. He—did—the—hitting.

[*He moves blindly forward, staggers and falls headlong a little above* DALLAS'S *chair.*

DALLAS. If I could only move—could only move.

HUGHES [*crawling closer*]. Take—pistol. They know, you see—they know——

[*There is a loud knocking at the door.*

DALLAS. Pray God it's the Yard!

HUGHES. Don't give up paper—except—except——

DALLAS [*struggling to reach him*]. Yes, old man? Yes?

HUGHES. The word is—flowers—he'll talk about flowers.

[*As he faints and* DALLAS *grasps and hides the pistol the outer door is burst open and two men rush into the room. One, small, ferret-faced, is dressed as a police-sergeant; the other, obviously*

the leader, is in plain clothes. He is a smooth, ingratiating personality, with an exaggerated and uneven brogue.

FIRST MAN [*the bigger*]. Now, I'm sorry to be forcing an entrance this way, sir, but hearing shooting—— [*Apparently only then seeing* HUGHES] Ah ! Dead ?

[*He uncovers reverently.*

SECOND MAN [*the smaller ; kneeling and loosening his collar*]. His heart's beating.

[DALLAS *gives a gesture of relief.*

FIRST MAN [*looking up as he helps his companion to raise* HUGHES]. This is a bad business, sir !

DALLAS. A murderous business, sir !

SECOND MAN [*in a low voice*]. You can leave him to me, Inspector. It's only a flesh wound. [*He makes a great show of folding a large handkerchief as a bandage.*] The fall's stunned him.

FIRST MAN [*rising*]. Ah, the black divils ! If we'd been here ten minutes sooner ! I'm from Scotland Yard, Mr——

DALLAS. Dallas. Captain Dallas.

FIRST MAN. My name's Pollock.

[*He opens his coat and shows his badge.*

DALLAS [*non-committally*]. I've heard of Inspector Pollock.

FIRST MAN. Mr Hughes rang up yesterday in the matter of a paper, a State paper. Finding his house empty, we drove up here——

DALLAS. Surely, Inspector, that can wait. Mr Hughes——

FIRST MAN. True for you. We must doctor him first. If ye'll allow my man to go through to prepare a bed, Captain——

DALLAS [*suspiciously*]. How do you know the house is empty, Inspector ?

FIRST MAN [*sunnily*]. Sure, no one didn't answer the

door. [*To the* SECOND MAN] And ye might well shut it, Dawson. It's a cold wind on the sick man.

[DAWSON *goes to the door, but as he swings it to it is flung open and a voice is heard stammering.*

THE VOICE. 'Alf a m-mo, g-guv'nor! 'Alf a m-mo!

FIRST MAN. The cabby! Ah, then, get rid of him, Dawson!

DALLAS [*glad to be of use*]. I'll attend to that, Inspector. He's an old acquaintance. You look after my friend. There's a linen cupboard in the next room. You'll want bandages. [DAWSON *nods and goes out.*] Well, Rowley, what do you want?

[*For a fat figure has appeared in the doorway in a chauffeur's overcoat and a peaked cap. Under the cap, which is pulled low over the forehead, is a twinkling, crinkling, jolly countenance, with a red nose and double chin, much muffled in huge comforter. It speaks in a rich, husky voice.*

ROWLEY. W-what do I want, C-capting? Why, I want my f-fare. T-ten an' t-tenpence, and the t-taxi still t-ticking.

DALLAS. Ten and —— [*He searches in vain for his pocket-book.*] You must wait a moment, Rowley. There's been an accident.

[*He turns to watch the* FIRST MAN, *who by this time has ripped off* HUGHES'S *coat. Whenever* DALLAS *speaks to* ROWLEY *he lets* HUGHES'S *head drop back and begins feeling over the pockets.*

ROWLEY [*advancing into the room*]. D-don't you mind me, g-guvnor. M-many's the time I've w-waited in your g-good aunt's days, and m-many's the c-cowslip-and-bitters I've 'ad, too—to screw up me c-courage on a frosty n-night—for when I'm t-temperate me t-tongue's t-tied up, g-guvnor, t-tight, but when I'm t-tight I'm t-talkative.

DALLAS. Oh, is that the trouble, Rowley? Well, help yourself.

[ROWLEY *makes a pretence of doing so, though it is obvious to the audience that the bottle is empty.*

ROWLEY. A g-gent, sir, that's what you are—like your aunt a-f-fore you.

FIRST MAN [*to* DALLAS]. We'll carry him through when Dawson comes back.

ROWLEY. 'Ere, I'll take an end, g-guvnor. J-just an-nother n-nip f-fust.

[*He pours, or pretends to pour, more whisky into his glass.*

FIRST MAN. You, you drunken swine? Don't let him have any more, sir! He was drunk before we started or we'd have been here sooner.

ROWLEY. D-drunk? 'Oo are you calling d-drunk? I'll drunk you, police or no police!

FIRST MAN [*darkly*]. Shut up, you fool, when a man's dying——

ROWLEY [*tipsily truculent*]. I'll die before 'e does, unless you 'ave the nursing of 'im. Drunk! Gi' me my ten an' t-tenpence.

FIRST MAN. Look here, you——

DALLAS. Better pay him, Inspector! We don't want a row.

FIRST MAN [*gives him money*]. Here you are. Now get out!

ROWLEY. All right, cocky, it's the Captain's 'ouse, an' 'e ast me as one gent to anover to 'ave a drink. [*He drinks again.*] 'E don't call 'is betters drunk. 'E's a gent, 'e is—if 'e 'as got a floor that slides like a ship at shea——

[*Singing.*

"For here she goes up, up, up,
And then she goes down, down, down,
Where the mermaidsh shwim
In their garden trim,

With the whales a-blowing
And the shea-flowers growing,
And the—hic!"

DALLAS. That's enough, Rowley, that's enough!

ROWLEY. Why, didn't you ever see a mermaid, sir, with a posy in 'er 'and? Oh, Lord! [*He staggers.*

DALLAS. Now, Rowley!

ROWLEY. Shea-shick, sir, jus' a li'l' bit shea-shick—s'hat's all, 'sure you! [*Staggering towards the fireplace*] Nothing sh' matter, but s'hink I'll lie down, sir, till the shtorm's over.

[*He trips and falls in a heap by* DALLAS'S *chair, still hugging the bottle, as* DAWSON *re-enters muttering to the other man as he stoops over* HUGHES.

DAWSON. Not a trace of it.

DALLAS. Trace of what, Inspector?

FIRST MAN [*hastily*]. Ah, sure, he was hunting bandages. But we'll tear a shirt. Take his feet, Dawson! So! [*They lift* HUGHES. *To* DALLAS] I'll stay with you and the gentleman, sir, when we've settled him, and Dawson shall go for help and take that drunken fella with him. [*To* DAWSON] Easy now—so—mind the step!

[*They carry* HUGHES *out. The door swings to behind them.*

DALLAS [*twisting in his chair and clenching his fist*]. Oh, God, if I could only walk! [*He sinks back, his hand falls in his lap, it opens and he stares at the paper crushed in his palm. He mutters hoarsely*] The formula!

A VOICE FROM THE FLOOR. I think you'd better give that to me.

DALLAS [*slewing round*]. Eh? What? What's that? Rowley!

[*The figure on the floor sits up, perfectly steady and cool, and lifts a large wig like a man lifting his hat. He is seen, under his wrinkles and make-up,*

to be youngish, slightly bald, with a quick, self-possessed manner and a grin like an Irish terrier. He is, if not quite a gentleman, at least sure of his aitches and himself. But we will continue to call him ROWLEY.

ROWLEY. Rowley's at home and in bed.

DALLAS. What? Who are you, then? His twin?

ROWLEY. Well, I'm known in the profession as "Nippy Jim"—but my name's Pollock, at your service—Inspector James Pollock. Come now, Captain, give me that paper before those rogues come back. It'll be safer with me.

DALLAS [*deliberately*]. I'm to ask for proof—Inspector.

ROWLEY. Proof? Haven't I been talking of roses and nosegays and cowslip wine ever since I got in? You'd be precious little use in our profession, Captain, if you couldn't tumble to it quicker than that.

DALLAS. Then those two——

ROWLEY. The smartest crooks in Europe—with a No. 1 Power behind them. Now, listen. I've my own men coming along—only waiting for me. Can you hold that big scoundrel——

DALLAS. The Irishman?

ROWLEY. Pooh! He's no more Irish than I am. Can's you hear his brogue's a fake? He's any nationality you please—or pay for. Well, can you hold him for—say, ten minutes, while I drive off with Dawson? Diddle him—make him think the papers are here?

DALLAS. I'll try.

ROWLEY. Hark! They're coming back. The formula—quick!

[*He pulls down his wig and crams on his peaked cap.*

DALLAS. Here—here! [*He hands it over.*] How'll you hide it?

ROWLEY. You'd better not know. So! Now, act up!

[*He rolls over on his face, snoring drunkenly, as the* FIRST MAN *enters followed by* DAWSON.

DALLAS [*anxiously*]. Well, gentlemen ?

FIRST MAN [*reassuringly*]. Ah, he'll do. But we must get a doctor to him. Here—you ! Wake up ! [*Kicking* ROWLEY, *who grunts and clutches his bottle*] What's your name—Rowson—Rowley ?

ROWLEY [*singing*].

" Roley, poley, pudd'n an' pie,
Kished the girls an'——"

My name's Baccush, an' I don't stir wishout my bottle.

[*He rises unsteadily. The man tries to take it from him.* ROWLEY *dodges.*

DAWSON. Oh, let him have it !

FIRST MAN. You don't mind, sir ? Dawson can't drive, you see.

DALLAS. Anything to save time.

DAWSON. Come on, then !

ROWLEY [*bowing and backing*]. Ladiesh firsht !

FIRST MAN [*humouring him*]. Go ahead, Dawson !

[DAWSON *goes towards the outer door.*

ROWLEY [*shocked, stopping him*]. No, no, allow me ! Pleash ! [*He offers his arm, then, pointing his toe*] One, two, three ! [*He forces* DAWSON *into a sort of barn-dance measure and prances out with him singing*]

" The flowers that bloom in she shpring, tra-la."

[*The door bangs on them.*

FIRST MAN [*leaning his back against it*]. Ah ! [*Then, with a note of triumph*] And now, Captain Dallas, that paper, please !

DALLAS [*steadily*]. What paper's that ?

FIRST MAN [*wheedling*]. Ah, Captain dear, ye needn't be afraid of me. I know well ye have it safe. Didn't Mr Hughes be telling me over the 'phone ?

DALLAS. Although the wires were cut ?

FIRST MAN. Before—before——

DALLAS. Before, eh ? You're quite sure you're from Scotland Yard, Inspector ?

FIRST MAN. From where else would I be ?

DALLAS. Don't ask me. Ask your employers, you hired thief !

FIRST MAN [*with an instant furious change of tone*]. So that's your game, is it ? [*Whipping out a pistol*] Hands up, then ! [*As* DALLAS *makes a movement to the pistol in his own pocket*] Up, I say !

[DALLAS *obeys, with a shrug.* [*Recovering himself, suavely*] Well, well, Captain, you're a bright lad for a Saxon. Not from Scotland Yard ? Ah, don't let a little thing like that worry ye at all. I can relieve ye of the burden of that paper just as well. [DALLAS'S *hands lower themselves angrily.*] Up, will ye ?

DALLAS. Afraid of a crippled man, eh ?

FIRST MAN. I am that—or rather of what I see under his pillow. [*He draws out and pockets the pistol.*] So —now ye lie easier—[*tying up his hands*]—with a bit of string round ye two wrists first, Captain dear ! Ah, don't try to snap it—it's pre-War twine and t'will bite ye to the bone. I always use it—it's as strong as the bracelets, and less noisy. And now ye're easy, me dear man, what about that paper ?

DALLAS. I tell you Mr Hughes brought no paper with him.

FIRST MAN. An' I tell you it's a black lie ! I saw the paper in his hand in the minute I shot him.

DALLAS. So it was you, was it ? I thought as much.

FIRST MAN. Ah, ye're too clever to live, Captain. Come now—I've no time to be triflin'. Where is it ?

DALLAS. You can search me. I can't stop you.

FIRST MAN. Ah, ye big man, ye take me for a little boy at school. Will Mr Hughes be leaving such a thing with a man that can't move ? No, no ! Sure ye'll be owning

some safe hiding-place or other that he well knew, close here in the room.

DALLAS. Then you'd better hunt about till you find it.

FIRST MAN. Ah, but that's where you come in, Captain. I'll be searching all day, but you know where it is. Now, ye're a wise man, Captain, and ye won't be annoying me with your hid knowledge when ye consider——

DALLAS. Nothing to consider, my man !

FIRST MAN. Ye're a helpless man, Captain. It's easy to make a helpless man speak—if one knows the choice way. Ever been in Russia, Captain ? Ye learn many a choice way in a Russian prison. Ah, come now, be reasonable !

DALLAS. Inspector—or whatever you call yourself——

FIRST MAN. "The Shepherd" they call me—— It's no matter.

DALLAS. Well, you shepherd of black sheep——

FIRST MAN. Is it an English joke, Captain ?

DALLAS. I tell you once and for all—believe it or not—I don't know the whereabouts of the paper—the formula—that you're after.

FIRST MAN. Ah, ye liar ! And but now ye said there was no paper.

DALLAS. I said he brought none. You said he did. If he did I don't know where it is.

FIRST MAN [*softly*]. But ye will, Captain darling, ye will ! [*He stands, arms crossed, brooding.*

DALLAS. Searching your Russian past for an inspiration, eh, Shepherd ?

FIRST MAN [*deadly*]. I'm not wondering how will I make you talk. I can do that twenty ways. I'm wondering what'll make ye talk quickest.

DALLAS. Did ye leave your pocket thumb-screw at home, Shepherd ? Tut ! How careless !

FIRST MAN [*turning savage*]. I'll "tut" ye ! [*He seizes the candlestick.*] If ye don't give me that paper before the

clock strikes I—I'll burn you alive where you lie. [DALLAS *laughs aloud.*] Ye can laugh. [*Subsiding into a silky whisper*] Ah, sure, it's the snug way—regrettable accident! Invalid sets his clothes alight! Sympathy with the relatives——! [*Between his teeth*] But it'll hurt ye, Captain, believe me! Feel that!

[*He holds the candle very close to his cheek.*

DALLAS [*writhing his head aside*]. Oh! Is that the idea! Neat!

FIRST MAN. That's but the start. Ah, ye'll talk right enough! [*The telephone bell rings. He turns.*] 'Twill be Dawson. [*He sets down the candle on the arm-rest of* DALLAS'S *chair.*] The drunken fella will have served his turn. [*He crosses to the stand.*] Ye can think things over while I speak with him, Captain! It's your last chance. [*Then, unhooking the receiver*] Hallo! That yourself, Dawson? Speak plain, can't ye? Eh? Ah, clear the line, me darling girl! That's better! Is that—— No, me dear—they've rung me. Ah, don't part us! Hallo! That yourself, Dawson? It's the Shepherd speaking. Well? Not yet, but I have him tied. Ah, tight enough. Ah, stop it, will ye? None of your refinements. A match between his fingers will do the trick. What? Then why the devil did ye not say so? I'll be with ye directly. With the papers? Why not? When have I failed ye? Well, then! Right! [*He hangs up the receiver. While he has been speaking,* DALLAS, *at first staring about him with hunted eyes, glances by chance at the candle. An idea strikes him. Noiselessly he holds out his bound hands over it so that the candle flame sets the string between his wrists alight. It smoulders a few moments, then, with a jerk, he parts it. With a look of triumph he lies back with his hands held in the same position as before, as the other man comes down to him.*] No time to lose, Captain! Your Scotland Yard friends are on the way. Will ye speak? Ye will not? [*He lifts the candle and bends over him.*] Right,

then ! [DALLAS'S *hands shoot out and catch him by the throat.*] A-a-ah ! !

[*There is a terrific struggle ; the other man, clawing and choking, almost black in the face, is forced to his knees.*

ROWLEY'S VOICE [*at the window, singing*].

" The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la——"

Want a little help, Captain ?

[*He vaults lightly into the room and overpowers the* FIRST MAN.

DALLAS [*sinking back exhausted*]. Only just in time, Inspector ! He was almost too much for me.

ROWLEY [*pulling the* FIRST MAN *to his feet*]. Or you for him. That's it, man ! Quietly ! [*He snaps on the handcuffs as the door opens and a couple of police with* DAWSON *between them appear in the doorway.*] I arrest you in the King's name, and warn you—— [*The man reels.*] Here, he'd better have a drink. [*He sets him in a chair and stretches out his hand for a glass ; then, comically*] I forgot —I ran off with it. [*He takes the bottle out of his pocket.*

DALLAS. It was empty, anyway. But you'll find——

[*He points to the cupboard.*

ROWLEY. Empty ? Oh, no, Captain ! Not quite.

[*He tips the bottle and a neat spill slides out. He presents it to* DALLAS *with a bow.*

DALLAS [*unrolling it*]. The formula !

FIRST MAN. What ? What ? What, you tricked me ? You tricked——

DALLAS. Well, I'm—— !

ROWLEY [*blandly*]. W-well, I had to put it s-somewhere, d-didn't I ?

[*Before there is time to answer him, the curtain falls.*

ADMIRAL PETERS

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By W. W. Jacobs and Horace Mills

Adapted from W. W. Jacobs' story of that title

CHARACTERS

George Burton, *a Naval pensioner*
Joe Stiles, *an old messmate of Burton's*
Mrs Dutton, *a widow*

This play was first produced at the Garrick Theatre, London, on June 7, 1909, with the following cast:

George Burton . .	Arthur Whitby
Joe Stiles . . .	Leon Quartermaine
Mrs Dutton . . .	Mary Weigall

ADMIRAL PETERS[1]

MUSIC FOR CURTAIN : "*Nancy Lee.*" *After first refrain ring up.*

SCENE : *Exterior of* BURTON'S *cottage at Seacombe. On the left, entrance into cottage. On the left of the centre, rustic table, chairs, etc. On the right of the centre, garden gate. A pretty seascape at back.*

GEORGE BURTON *and* JOE STILES *discovered.* BURTON *is sitting with a dejected air.* JOE *is looking quite cheerful and happy.*

GEORGE [*sitting right of table*]. It's no good, Joe, it's no good ; she'll never speak to me again. She always thought I was a ' Sammy ' teetotaller, but after seeing me last night——

JOE [*sitting left of table*]. It was unlucky, but it can't be helped.

GEORGE. What did you want to come here at all for, destroying my peace and happiness ?

JOE. Well, there's gratitude ! I arrive in London, says I to myself, " I haven't seen my old pal George Burton for seven years," and I takes the trouble to find out where you've settled down, and so yesterday down I comes from London, and now you talk like that. Oh, George, I'm ashamed of you, I'm ashamed of you, that I am.

GEORGE [*tapping table with finger*]. Why did you go and ' loor ' me on to grog ?

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

JOE [*sadly*]. I didn't 'loor' you, George. [*Quickly*] You didn't want no luring.

GEORGE. Yes, you did. I wouldn't care, only—just my luck—Mrs Dutton sees us coming out of the Cock and Flower-pot.

JOE. Well, we couldn't help coming out—we was *pushed* out. [BURTON *sighs*.] Buck up, old man!

[*Rises and goes to back of table.*

GEORGE. You've queered my chances with Mrs Dutton, and we've been keeping company for pretty near six months now; she won't have nothing more to do with me, I know.

JOE. Pooh! Just because she saw you with a cargo of whisky aboard. Rubbish! She'll come round.

GEORGE. No, she won't. She's chapel, and very particular. She always said she'd break it off if I took anything stronger than ginger ale.

JOE [*reflecting*]. Tell her it was the sea air acting on an old sunstroke.

GEORGE. Pooh! She ain't a fool.

JOE. Well, don't be down-'earted. [*Patting him on the shoulder*] Have a drop of grog.

GEORGE. Grog! Bah! I can't bear the sight of it.

[*Rises.*

JOE. Then drink it with your eyes shut. I'll fetch it.

[*Turns into cottage on the left.*

GEORGE [*coming left, rises*]. I wish to goodness you'd leave the grog alone. You was always getting me into trouble when we was messmates together.

JOE [*off*]. What you want is a tonic.

GEORGE. Tonic! I wish you'd leave me and my inn'ards alone.

JOE [*off*]. Stow it!

[*Re-enter* STILES *with bottles and glasses, which he puts on a table.*

JOE. Here we are. Let's have a drop of this.

GEORGE. I'd rather not touch it.

[*Away to left and again to table.*

JOE. Well, if you won't, you won't. I was thinking more about myself. [*Pours out.*] I can't bear the stuff, but the doctor says I must have it. You know what doctors are, George. [*Pours out grog.*

[JOE *pours out two glasses—his own half full—* GEORGE'S *an eighth full.* GEORGE *changes glasses unseen by* JOE; JOE *discovers; annoyed.*

JOE. Well, here's Mrs Dutton's health, and to the happy couple.

[GEORGE *is about to drink when he suddenly starts and puts his glass down.*

What's the matter?

GEORGE. Look! Look! There she is coming this way. Take away these things, Joe, for heaven's sake. What on earth am I to say to her? What am I to do?

[*Goes centre, behind table.*

JOE [*pushed off by* GEORGE]. Don't be frightened, mate—I'll go inside. I don't want to interfere with your billing and cooing. Two's company—you know—eh? Ha, ha!

[JOE *exits with bottles and glasses, laughing.* GEORGE *leans against door.*

[MRS DUTTON *enters—she looks at him scornfully, pauses, comes to the centre of stage.*

GEORGE. Er—good morning—lovely morning, Mrs Dutton.

MRS DUTTON [*severely*]. Good morning, Mr Burton. I've called round to return the books you lent me.

GEORGE [*meekly*]. Thank you, Mrs Dutton. I hope you liked 'em.

MRS DUTTON. Very much, thank you, especially this one— [*reads title*] *The Advantages of Total Abstinence.*

GEORGE [*coughs awkwardly—pause*]. I saw you last night.

MRS DUTTON. I saw you too. I could hardly believe my eyesight. I thought you were a teetotaller.

GEORGE. So I am. [JOE *rattles glasses—off.*] I mean—I was.

MRS DUTTON. It didn't look like it last night, dancing and singing in the middle of the village.

GEORGE [*feebly*]. Was I ? [*Coming to left of table.*

MRS DUTTON. Ah ! I don't suppose you remember it. Who was that horrid man with you ?

GEORGE. It was—an old shipmate of mine. He hadn't seen me for years, and I suppose the sight of me upset him.

MRS DUTTON. I dare say—that and the Cock and Flower-pot too—I heard all about it.

[*Puts market-basket on table.*

GEORGE [*feebly*]. He would go. I tried all I could to persuade him not to.

MRS DUTTON. *You* needn't have gone.

GEORGE. I 'ad to.

MRS DUTTON. You 'ad to—why ?

GEORGE. I 'ad to. He's—an old officer of mine, and it wouldn't have been discipline for me to refuse. You don't know how strict discipline is in the Navy.

MRS DUTTON. Officer ? [*Long pause.*

GEORGE [*desperately*]. Yes. My old admiral. Admiral Peters. You've heard me speak of Admiral Peters ?

MRS DUTTON. Admiral ! What ! A-carrying on like that ? Dancing and singing with his arm round your neck !

GEORGE. He's a regular old sea-dog. He's staying with me. [*Coming to her confidentially*] But of course he don't want it to be known who he is ! I couldn't refuse to 'ave a drink with 'im—I was under orders, so to speak.

MRS DUTTON. Yes, I suppose so. Fancy him staying with *you*—an admiral !

GEORGE. He's only run down for the night, but I expect he'll be going 'ome in an hour or two.

MRS DUTTON [*evidently impressed*]. Dear me ! I should

like to have seen him. Didn't you tell me once that he was uncle to Lord Buckfast ?

GEORGE. Buckwheat—oh, yes !

MRS DUTTON. Buckfast.

GEORGE. Er—yes—Buckfast—I did. [*Aside*] Oh, lor !

[*Away down left.*

MRS DUTTON. The idea of an admiral staying with *you* !

GEORGE [*returning to her. Feebly*]. Of course, it's a secret between us three, Mrs Dutton. You mustn't breathe a word of it to a living soul.

MRS DUTTON. Of course ; you can tell the Admiral that I shall not mention it to anybody. Well, I must go now. Of course, it does make a difference. [*They shake hands.*] I ain't unreasonable—you could hardly refuse to obey an admiral. You can come and see me this evening, George, same as usual, if you like, and——

GEORGE. Well ?

MRS DUTTON. Bring the *dear Admiral* with you.

[*Exit mincingly to the right.*

GEORGE. The dear Admiral !

[*Sings "Nancy Lee"—dances down centre.*

[*Enter* JOE STILES *from cottage.*

JOE. Bravo ! Well, my hearty, how goes it ? Stormy weather—or did she let you down easy ?

GEORGE [*laughing*]. Ah, that was all right—that was all right. I managed her. I 'ad an idea—I told her you was an admiral.

JOE. An admiral ?

GEORGE. Yes—Admiral Peters—what d'you think o' that for an excuse ? Eh ?

JOE. What ! *Me !* Admiral Peters ! What's the game ?

GEORGE. I told her I 'ad to drink last night—seeing it was your orders the Admiral's orders—d'ye see ?

JOE. Me ? —an admiral ! Splendid ! It's lucky for you, George, that I can *look* the part. I've always had a sort of idea that I should have been an admiral, only I was *changed*

at birth. George, my lad, I shall stay with you for a week or two. It'll do you a world of good to be seen on friendly terms with an admiral.

GEORGE. No, no. I think you had better go 'ome after dinner, Joe.

JOE. No, George, I won't desert you !

GEORGE. But if anyone sees you—I'll have to say you are an admiral now——

JOE. All the better, stupid. Can't I tell 'em how we fought and bled together in days gone by ?

GEORGE. Ah !

JOE. 'Ow we got our medals as 'eroes for savin' life at sea.

GEORGE. But we didn't get no medals.

JOE. Oh, George, George, you've no imagination. Admiral Peters, eh ! He was a scorcher—he was. I wonder if I might use the old boy's language.

GEORGE [*in alarm*]. No, certainly not ! You've no idea how particular she is.

[*Re-enter* MRS DUTTON *from right.*

JOE. It seems a pity. However——

[GEORGE *sees* MRS DUTTON, *coughs, and nudges* JOE.

MRS DUTTON [*speaking in a very precise genteel manner*]. I left my basket, Mr Burton. [*Sees* STILES, *who is striking attitudes. Aside*] The Admiral—— !

JOE [*nudges* GEORGE]. Introduce me, Burton.

GEORGE [*awkwardly*]. Er — Mrs Dutton — [*to* JOE, *aside*]—go away—er—this is my old officer, Admiral Peters.

JOE [*loftily*]. Delighted, madam, delighted.

[*Crosses to centre on her left.*

MRS DUTTON [*smirking*]. I'm afraid you find this a very 'umble place, Admiral ?

JOE. It's comfortable, ma'am. Ah ! you should see some of the palaces I've been in abroad, all show and no comfort. Not a decent chair in the place—and as for antimacassars !

MRS DUTTON. Are you making a long stay, Admiral Peters ?

JOE. It depends. My intention was just to pay a flying visit to my honest old friend Burton here—best man in my squadron—but he is so hospitable, he's been pressing me to stay for a few weeks.

GEORGE [*hastily*]. But the Admiral says he *must* go back to-morrow morning.

JOE [*with an air of reminding him*]. Unless I have a letter at breakfast-time, Burton.

GEORGE [*turns away disgusted*]. Bah !

MRS DUTTON. Oh, I do hope you will !

JOE. I have a feeling that I shall. The only thing is—my people ; they want me to join them at Lord Bampton's place.

GEORGE [*aside*]. His people !

[MRS DUTTON *expresses admiration.*

MRS DUTTON [*aside*]. Lord Bampton ! [*Aloud*] What a change shore-life must be to you after the perils of the sea, Admiral Peters !

JOE. Ah ! true—true !

MRS DUTTON. The dreadful fighting !

[*Sitting on bench to right of centre.*

JOE. You get used to it. Hottest time I had, I think, was at the bombardment of Alexandria—I stood alone. [GEORGE *indicates to* JOE *to include him.*] All the men who hadn't been shot down had fled, and the shells were bursting round me like—like fireworks.

MRS DUTTON [*horrified*]. Lor' !

GEORGE [*smiling and spreading out hand*]. I was standing just behind 'im waiting for any orders he might give——

JOE [*reflecting*]. Was you ? Was you ? I don't remember it, Burton.

[GEORGE *shakes fist at* JOE—*is seen by* MRS DUTTON —*and converts action into a salute.*

GEORGE [*irritably*]. Why, I was just behind you, sir. If

you remember, sir, I said to you that it was pretty hot work. Says I—I says, sir—— [*Pause.*

JOE [*still reflecting*]. No, Burton, no. So far as my memory goes, I was the only man there.

GEORGE [*getting desperate*]. A bit of shell knocked my cap off, sir.

JOE [*sharply*]. That'll do, my man, that'll do—not another word. You forget yourself.

GEORGE [*saluting*]. Aye, aye, sir—but——

JOE. Silence.

[JOE *waves him off.* BURTON *begins to lose his temper.* JOE *takes chair from right of table and sits in the centre.*

JOE [*to* MRS DUTTON]. My people—ahem! My people have heard of Burton. He often *has* shared my dangers. We have been in many tight places together. [*To* GEORGE] Do you remember those two nights when we were hidden in the chimney at the palace of the Sultan of Zanzibar, Burton?

GEORGE [*recovering*]. I should think I do.

JOE. Stuck so tight we could hardly breathe.

GEORGE [*fervently*]. I shall never forget it as long as I live.

MRS DUTTON. Oh, do tell me about it, Admiral Peters! [*Looks at the two men.*

JOE. Surely Burton has told you that?

MRS DUTTON [*reproachfully*]. Never breathed a word of it.

JOE. Well, tell it now, Burton. [*Passing* BURTON *and going towards left.* BURTON *protests.*] Tell it now.

[BURTON *hesitates—begins story—gets chair, is about to sit—*JOE *coughs—*BURTON *rises.*

GEORGE [*taken aback*]. No, no; you tell it better than I do, sir. [*Aside*] I don't know what you're driving at.

JOE. No, no. You tell it; it's your story.

GEORGE. It's your story, sir.

JOE [*decidedly*]. No. [*Goes down left, returns in front of* BURTON *to left.*] I won't tell it. It wouldn't be fair to poor Burton. I'd forgotten that when I spoke. Of course—you were young at the time, still——

GEORGE [*trembling with rage*]. I've done nothing that I'm ashamed of [JOE *withers him with a look*], sir.

MRS DUTTON [*winsomely*]. I think it's very hard, if I'm not to *hear* it.

[JOE *looks significantly at* MRS DUTTON, *shakes his head, and nods towards* GEORGE.

GEORGE [*with grim emphasis*]. At any rate, you were in the chimney with me, sir. [*Salute and laugh.*

JOE [*severely*]. Ah! but what was I there *for*, my man? *Tell me that.*

[GEORGE BURTON *stares at him in dismay.*

MRS DUTTON. What *were* you there for, Admiral Peters?

JOE [*impressively*]. I was there, ma'am, to save the life of Burton. [BURTON *drops on table.*] I never deserted my men—never. Whatever scrapes they got into, I did my best to get them out. News was brought to me that Burton was suffocating in the chimney of the Sultan's favourite wife, and—— [BURTON *springs to his feet.*

MRS DUTTON [*rises excitedly*]. Sultan's favourite wife! [*Crosses to table.*] Good gracious! I never heard of such a thing! I am surprised!

GEORGE [*hoarse with rage*]. So am I—I—I——

[*Look from* JOE *and salute from* BURTON.

MRS DUTTON [*glancing indignantly at* BURTON]. How did you escape, Admiral Peters?

JOE. To tell you that, ma'am, would be to bring the French Consul into it. I oughtn't to have mentioned the subject at all. [*Pause.*] Burton had the good sense not to.

GEORGE. But, I say, about this yer——

JOE. Silence. We'd better talk of something else. [*Turns to* MRS DUTTON, *taking her arm.* MRS DUTTON *looks at*

BURTON *triumphantly*.] Do you know, Mrs Dutton, you remind me very much——

GEORGE. About this yer Sultan——

JOE. That'll do.

GEORGE. Yes—but——

JOE. Silence.

GEORGE. Yes—but——

JOE. 'Tention — right turn — quick MARCH! Halt, front, right-about-turn—quick march—right turn—halt—front——

MRS DUTTON. Oh, this *is* fine!

JOE. Do you like it? We'll have some more. Extension movements—first exercise—commence, commence—steady.

[BURTON *left bending over touching his toes with his hands*.

JOE. Do you know, Mrs Dutton, you remind me very much of the Duchess of Marford.

MRS DUTTON. Oh, Admiral!

[*Looks down simpering*. BURTON *coughs*.

JOE. Yes, she was a blonde, but [*looking at widow*] give me a brunette. [GEORGE *coughs*.

JOE. Oh, it's you! 'Tention, stand at ease. Stand easy. Dismiss.

[JOE *looks at him sternly, as he recovers breath, pulls down his waistcoat, etc., then takes* WIDOW'S *hand*.

JOE [*sitting by* MRS DUTTON]. What a dear little 'and!

[GEORGE *very indignant*—JOE *examining her hand*. Why, how peculiar! You see that line there? That shows you will marry again.

MRS DUTTON. Lor'! Does it?

GEORGE [*putting hand forward. Fist clenched*]. Why, I've got a line like that, [*opens fist*] sir.

JOE [*knocks his hand up*]. No, Burton. [*Shakes his head.*] No, I'm sorry to say that is *not* what that line means.

GEORGE [*gruffly*]. Well, what *does* it mean then ? [*Look from* JOE.] Sir.

JOE [*gravely*]. I regret, Burton, that I cannot tell you in the presence of Mrs Dutton.

[GEORGE *aghast*—JOE *turns to* MRS DUTTON.

JOE [*looks at hand again*]. Why, what's this ? You are going to marry a naval man. [GEORGE *looks pleased.*

GEORGE. Eh ?

MRS DUTTON. A naval man, lor' !

JOE. Yes, a naval officer of very high rank.

GEORGE [*excited*]. Eh !

[*Comes to centre.* JOE *ignores him.*

JOE [*continuing*]. Ah ! What's this ! Oh, I say ! I say——

MRS DUTTON. What is it, Admiral ?

JOE. Ah, Mrs Dutton, I'm afraid you're a saucy little baggage.

[MRS DUTTON *giggles.* JOE *moves closer to her*— GEORGE *coughs angrily.*

JOE [*annoyed*]. Burton !

GEORGE [*snappishly*]. Sir !

JOE. 'Ere, just run inside and fetch my pipe for me. I left it somewhere about. If it isn't in the house it's at the bottom of the garden.

[BURTON *hesitates and shakes his fist at* JOE, *unseen by the* WIDOW.

JOE. Look sharp.

GEORGE. I'm very sorry, sir, but I—I broke it.

JOE. Broke it ?

GEORGE [*glib satisfaction*]. Yes, sir, I knocked it on the floor and trod on it by accident. Smashed it to powder—sir.

JOE. You clumsy fathead ! That pipe was a present from the Italian Ambassador. [*To* MRS DUTTON] Burton was always a clumsy man. He had the name for it when

he was on the *Destruction* with me—" Bungling Burton," they called him.

[MRS DUTTON *looks contemptuously at* BURTON *who is boiling with rage.*

Do you remember, Burton, that time when you were so drunk you wanted to go and punch the Captain's head? [BURTON *collapses on table.*] If it hadn't been for me, ma'am, poor Burton would have had a taste of the cat. You remember that, Burton?

GEORGE. No, I'm . . . No, I *don't*, sir.

JOE [*to* WIDOW]. Shocking memory, Burton. [*Leans over* WIDOW, *sees* BURTON.] Burton, just go and see what's o'clock.

GEORGE. It's just gone eleven, sir.

MRS DUTTON [*rising*]. Eleven!

JOE. What, not going, ma'am?

MRS DUTTON [*reluctantly*]. Oh, I'm afraid I must go, Admiral, I've got to meet a friend at a quarter past eleven. But—I—I—perhaps I shall see you again, as you think of making a long stay.

JOE [*theatrically to* BURTON]. Left turn—eyes front. Then fare thee well. [*Takes* WIDOW'S *hand and looks affectionately at her—backs into* GEORGE.] We shall meet again, Mrs Dutton. In the meantime, your sweet face will haunt me, sleeping or waking. Good-bye—good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye!

[MRS DUTTON *gives him a coquettish look as she goes off, to the right, and* JOE *kisses his hand to her.*

[GEORGE *confronts* JOE, *speechless with rage, throws cap on ground*—JOE *grinning.*

GEORGE. Why the—why the—you—you——

JOE [*picks up chair, defending himself*]. Calm yourself, George, calm yourself.

GEORGE. What do you mean by it? How *dare* you tell lies about me!

JOE [*smirking*]. I can't help being good-looking, George.

GEORGE [*throws chair off*]. Your good *looks* wouldn't hurt anybody. It's the Admiral business that fetches her. It's turned her head.

JOE. Ah, she'll say ' snap ' to my ' snip ' any time. And remember, George, there'll always be a knife and fork laid for you, when you like to come.

GEORGE [*coming to* JOE]. I dessay. Only as it happens, I'm going to tell her the truth about you, first thing—if I can't have her, you shan't.

JOE [*centre*]. That'll spoil your chance too. She'll never forgive you for fooling her like that. It seems a pity that neither of us should get her.

GEORGE [*angrily*]. You're a sarpint—a sarpint that I've warmed in my bosom——

JOE [*stopping him*]. That'll do, that'll do. There's no call to be indelicate, George.

GEORGE. " Indelicate ! " I—I——

JOE. Now, look 'ere. I'm agreeable to going back by the 12.15 to-day, without seeing her again—if it's made worth my while.

GEORGE. Made worth your while ?

JOE. Certainly—she's not a bad-looking woman for her age—and you say it's a snug little business.

GEORGE. Well, if—if 'arf a sovereign——

JOE. 'Arf a fiddlestick ! I want five pounds.

GEORGE. Five pounds !

JOE. You've just drawn your pension, and, besides, you've always been a saving man all your life.

GEORGE. Five pounds ! Do you think I've got a gold-mine in my back-garden ? D'you think I'm made of money—you shark ! You villain—you—you swindler——

JOE [*calmly*]. I don't go for a penny less. Five pounds and my ticket back—if you call me any more o' those names, I'll make it ten.

GEORGE. You—you—son of a——

JOE. Now, now, George—be careful.

GEORGE [*sinking on to bench*]. I can't afford five pounds [*dolefully*].

JOE [*emphatically*]. Then I can't afford to go.

GEORGE [*slowly*]. Well, if I do pay it, what am I to explain to Mrs Dutton ?

JOE. Anything you like. Tell her I'm engaged to my cousin, and our marriage keeps being put off on account of my eccentric behaviour. That would sound reasonable. Tell any lies you like. I shall never turn up to contradict them.

GEORGE. Well—I suppose I must. [*Groans.*] And I was just going to take it down to the bank ! [*Produces notebook and takes out note.*] There you are, bah ! And there—[*handing money*]—is your fare.

JOE [*goes up—stops, comes down*]. Here, what's this—third-class fare ?

GEORGE. Well, of course.

JOE. Third-class ! Who ever heard of an admiral riding third-class ?

GEORGE [*endeavouring to repress his rage*]. But they don't know you're an admiral.

JOE. No, but I feel like one. Come on, fork out.

[*Music till curtain.*

GEORGE [*hands money*]. I shall have to starve for *three months* to make up for this.

JOE. Good-bye, George ; thank you, George. [*Holds out hand.*] I've enjoyed my visit very much.

GEORGE [*growls*]. I hope you'll bloomin' well break your bloomin' neck.

JOE [*goes up centre*]. I'm letting you off easy. I'd ha' had the widow myself if it hadn't ha' been for *one little thing*.

GEORGE [*growls*]. What little thing ?

JOE [*at exit*]. Nothing, George, nothing. Just one of those 'ere little things we all think such a lot of till we've got 'em, you know.

GEORGE. What is it ?

JOE. It ain't a it, George, it's a she !
GEORGE. A she—what, you don't mean——
JOE. My wife.
GEORGE. Your what ?
JOE. My wife.

[GEORGE *falls in a chair, struggling for breath. Music swells.*

CURTAIN

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GATE

By Beulah Marie Dix

CHARACTERS

Captain Hugh Talbot
John Talbot
Dick Fenton
Kit Newcombe
Myles Butler
Phelimy Driscoll

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GATE[1]

SCENE : *In the cheerless hour before the dawn of a wet spring morning five gentlemen-troopers of the broken Royalist army, fagged and outworn with three long days of siege, are holding, with what strength and courage are left them, the gatehouse of the Bridge of Cashala, which is the key to the road that leads into Connaught. The upper chamber of the gatehouse, in which they make their stand, is a narrow, dim-lit apartment, built of stone. At one side is a small fireplace, and beside it a narrow, barred door, which leads to the stairhead. At the end of the room, gained by a single raised step, are three slit-like windows, breast-high, designed, as now used, for defence in time of war. The room is meagrely furnished, with a table on which are powder-flask, touch-box, etc., for charging guns, a stool or two, and an open keg of powder. The whole look of the place, bare and martial, but depressed, bespeaks a losing fight. On the hearth the ashes of a fire are white, and on the chimney-piece a brace of candles are guttering out.*

The five men who hold the gatehouse wear much-soiled and torn military dress. They are pale, powder-begrimed, sunken-eyed, with every mark of weariness of body and soul. Their leader, JOHN TALBOT, *is standing at one of the shot-windows, with piece presented, looking forth. He is in his mid-twenties, of Norman-Irish blood, and distinctly of a finer, more nervous, type*

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Henry Holt and Co., 1 Park Avenue, New York.

than his companions. He has been wounded, and bears his left hand wrapped in a bloody rag. DICK FENTON, *a typical, careless young English swashbuckler, sits by the table, charging a musket, and singing beneath his breath as he does so. He too has been wounded, and bears a bandage about his knee. Upon the floor (at right)* KIT NEWCOMBE *lies in the sleep of utter exhaustion. He is an English lad, in his teens, a mere tired, haggard child, with his head rudely bandaged. On a stool by the hearth sits* MYLES BUTLER, *a man of* JOHN TALBOT'S *own years, but a slower, heavier, almost sullen type. Beside him kneels* PHELIMY DRISCOLL, *a nervous, dark Irish lad, of one-and-twenty. He is resting his injured arm across* BUTLER'S *knee, and* BUTLER *is roughly bandaging the hurt.*

For a moment there is a weary, heavy silence, in which the words of the song which FENTON *sings are audible. It is the doleful old strain of 'the hanging tune.'*

FENTON [*singing*].

"Fortune, my foe, why dost thou frown on me,
And will thy favours never greater be?
Wilt thou, I say, for ever breed me pain,
And wilt thou not restore my joys again?"

BUTLER [*shifting* DRISCOLL'S *arm, none too tenderly*]. More to the light!

DRISCOLL [*catching breath with pain*]. Ah! Softly, Myles!

JOHN TALBOT [*leaning forward tensely*]. Ah!

FENTON. Jack! Jack Talbot! What is it that you see?

JOHN TALBOT [*with the anger of a man whose nerves are strained almost beyond endurance*]. What should I see but Cromwell's watch-fires along the boreen? What else

should I see, and the night as black as the mouth of hell? What else should I see, and a pest choke your throat with your fool's questions, Dick Fenton!

[*Resumes his watch.*

FENTON [*as who should say "I thank you!"*]. God 'a mercy—*Captain* Talbot! [*Resumes his singing.*

DRISCOLL. God's love! I bade ye have a care, Myles Butler.

BUTLER [*tying the last bandage*]. It's a stout heart you have in you, Phelimy Driscoll—you to be crying out for a scratch. It's better you would have been, you and the like of you, to be stopping at home with your mother.

[*Rises and takes up his musket from the corner by the fireplace.*

DRISCOLL. You—you dare—you call me—coward? Ye black liar! I'll lesson ye! I'll——

[*Tries to rise, but in the effort sways weakly forward and rests with his head upon the stool which* BUTLER *has quitted.*

BUTLER. A' Heaven's name, ha' done with that hanging tune! Ha' done, Dick Fenton! We're not yet at the gallows' foot. [*Joins* JOHN TALBOT *at the shot-windows.*

FENTON. Nay, Myles, for us 'tis like to be nothing half so merry as the gallows.

BUTLER. Hold your fool's tongue!

NEWCOMBE [*crying out in his sleep*]. Oh! Oh!

JOHN TALBOT. What was that?

FENTON. 'Twas naught but young Newcombe that cried out in the clutch of a nightmare.

BUTLER. 'Tis time Kit Newcombe rose and stood his watch.

JOHN TALBOT [*leaving the window*]. Nay, 'tis only a boy. Let him sleep while he can! Let him sleep!

BUTLER. Turn and turn at the watch, 'tis but fair. Stir yonder sluggard awake, Dick!

FENTON. Aye. [*Starts to rise.*

JOHN TALBOT. Who gives commands here? Sit you down, Fenton! To your place, Myles Butler!

BUTLER. Captain of the Gate! D'ye mark the high tone of him, Dick?

JOHN TALBOT [*tying a fresh bandage about his hand*]. You're out there, Myles. There is but one Captain of the Gate of Connaught—he who set me here—my cousin, Hugh Talbot.

BUTLER [*muttering*]. Aye, and it's a deal you'll need to be growing, ere you fill Hugh Talbot's shoes.

JOHN TALBOT. And that's a true word! But 'twas Hugh Talbot's will that I should command, here at the Bridge of Cashala. And as long as breath is in me I——

DRISCOLL [*raising his head heavily*]. Water! Water! Myles! Dick! Will ye give me to drink, lads? Jack Talbot! I'm choked wi' thirst.

JOHN TALBOT. There's never a drop of water left us, Phelimy lad.

FENTON. Owen Bourke drained the last of it, God rest him!

BUTLER. 'Tis likely our clever new Captain of the Gate will hit on some shift to fill our empty casks.

[DRISCOLL *rises heavily*.

JOHN TALBOT. Not the new Captain of the Gate. The old Captain of the Gate—Hugh Talbot. He'll be here this day—this hour, maybe.

FENTON. That tale grows something old, Jack Talbot.

JOHN TALBOT. He swore he'd bring us succour. He——

[DRISCOLL *tries to unbar the exit door*.

Driscoll! Are you gone mad? Stand you back from that door! [*Thrusts* DRISCOLL *from the door*.

DRISCOLL [*half delirious*]. Let me forth! The spring—'tis just below—there on the river-bank! Let me slip down to it—but a moment—and drink!

JOHN TALBOT. Cromwell's soldiers hold the spring.

DRISCOLL. I care not. Let me forth and drink ! Let me forth.

JOHN TALBOT. 'Twould be to your death.

BUTLER. And what will he get but his death if he stay here, Captain Talbot ?

DRISCOLL [*struggling with* JOHN TALBOT]. I'm choked ! I'm choked, I tell ye ! Let me go, Jack Talbot ! Let me go !

NEWCOMBE [*still half asleep, rises to his knees, with a terrible cry, and his groping hands upthrust to guard his head*]. God's pity ! No ! no ! no !

DRISCOLL [*shocked into sanity, staggers back, crossing himself*]. God shield us !

BUTLER. Silence that whelp !

FENTON. Clear to the rebel camp they'll hear him !

JOHN TALBOT [*catching* NEWCOMBE *by the shoulder*]. Newcombe ! Kit Newcombe !

NEWCOMBE. Ah, God ! Keep them from me ! Keep them from me !

JOHN TALBOT. Ha' done ! Ha' done !

NEWCOMBE. Not that ! Not the butt of the muskets ! Not that ! Not that !

JOHN TALBOT [*stifling* NEWCOMBE'S *outcry with a hand upon his mouth*]. Wake ! You're dreaming !

DRISCOLL. 'Tis ill-luck ! 'Tis ill-luck comes of such dreaming !

NEWCOMBE. Drogheda ! I dreamed I was at Drogheda, where my brother—my brother—they beat out his brains — Cromwell's men — with their clubbed muskets — they—— [*Clings shuddering to* JOHN TALBOT.

FENTON. English officers that serve amongst the Irish—'tis thus that Cromwell uses them !

BUTLER. English officers—aye, like ourselves !

JOHN TALBOT. Be quiet, Kit ! You're far from Drogheda —here at the Bridge of Cashala.

BUTLER. Aye, safe in Cashala gatehouse, with five hundred of Cromwell's men sitting down before it.

JOHN TALBOT. Keep your watch, Butler!

NEWCOMBE. You give orders? You still command, Jack? Where's Captain Talbot, then?

[*Snatches up his sword and rises.*

BUTLER [*quitting the window*]. Aye, where *is* Captain Talbot?

JOHN TALBOT. You say——

FENTON [*rising*]. We all say it.

JOHN TALBOT. Even thou, Dick?

DRISCOLL. He does not come! Hugh Talbot does not come!

FENTON. He bade us hold the bridge one day. We've held it three days now.

BUTLER. And where is Hugh Talbot with the aid he promised?

JOHN TALBOT. He promised. He has never broken faith. He will bring us aid.

FENTON. Aye, if he be living!

DRISCOLL. Living? You mean that he—— Och, he's dead! Hugh Talbot's dead! And we're destroyed! We're destroyed!

NEWCOMBE [*cowering*]. The butt of the muskets!

FENTON. God!

[*Deliberately* BUTLER *lays down his musket.*

JOHN TALBOT. Take up your piece!

BUTLER. Renounce me if I do!

FENTON. I stand with you, Myles Butler. Make terms for us, John Talbot, or, on my soul, we'll make them for ourselves.

JOHN TALBOT. Surrender?

NEWCOMBE. Will Cromwell spare us, an we yield ourselves now? Will he spare us? Will he——

FENTON. 'Tis our one chance.

NEWCOMBE. Give me that white rag!

[*Crosses and snatches a bandage from chimney-piece.*

FENTON [*drawing his ramrod*]. Here's a staff!

[*Together* FENTON *and* NEWCOMBE *make ready a flag of truce.*

JOHN TALBOT [*struggling with* BUTLER *and* DRISCOLL]. A black curse on you!

BUTLER. We'll not be butchered like oxen in the shambles!

JOHN TALBOT. Your oaths!

BUTLER. We'll not fight longer to be knocked on the head at the last.

NEWCOMBE. No! No! Not that! Out with the flag, Dick!

FENTON. A light here at the grating!

[NEWCOMBE *turns to take a candle, obedient to* FENTON'S *order. At that moment, close at hand, a bugle sounds.*

JOHN TALBOT. Hark!

DRISCOLL. The bugle! They're upon us!

BUTLER [*releasing his hold on* JOHN TALBOT]. What was that?

JOHN TALBOT. You swore to hold the bridge.

BUTLER. Swore to hold it one day. We've held it three days now.

FENTON. And the half of us are slain.

NEWCOMBE. And we've no water—and no food!

JOHN TALBOT [*pointing to the powder-keg*]. We have powder in plenty.

DRISCOLL. We can't *drink* powder. Ah, for God's love, be swift, Dick Fenton! Be swift!

JOHN TALBOT. You shall not show that white flag!

[*Starts toward* FENTON, *hand on sword.*

BUTLER [*pinioning* JOHN TALBOT]. God's death! We shall! Help me here, Phelimy!

JOHN TALBOT. A summons to parley. What see you, Fenton?

FENTON [*at the shot-window*]. Torches coming from the

boreen, and a white flag beneath them. I can see the faces. [*With a cry*] Look, Jack! A' God's name! Look! [JOHN TALBOT *springs to the window.*

DRISCOLL. What is it you're seeing?

FENTON. It *is*——

JOHN TALBOT [*turning from the window*]. 'Tis Hugh Talbot comes! 'Tis the Captain of the Gate!

BUTLER. With them? A prisoner?

JOHN TALBOT. No! no! No prisoner! He wears his sword. [BUTLER *snatches up his piece and resumes watch.*

FENTON. Then he'll have made terms with them! Terms!

NEWCOMBE [*embracing* DRISCOLL]. Terms for us! Terms for us!

JOHN TALBOT. I told ye truth. He has come. Hugh Talbot has come. [*Goes to door.*

HUGH TALBOT [*speaks outside*]. Open! I come alone, and in peace. Open unto me!

JOHN TALBOT. Who goes there?

HUGH TALBOT [*outside*]. The Captain of the Gate!

[JOHN TALBOT *unbars the door, and bars it again upon the entrance of* HUGH TALBOT. *The latter comes slowly into the room. He is a man in his late thirties, a tall, martial figure, clad in much-worn velvet and leather, with sword at side. The five salute him as he enters.*

HUGH TALBOT [*halts and for a moment surveys his followers*]. Well, lads?

[*The five stand trembling on the edge of a nervous break, unable for the moment to speak.*

NEWCOMBE. We thought—we thought—that you—that you—— [*Breaks into childish sobbing.*

FENTON. What terms will they grant us, sir?

JOHN TALBOT. Sir, we have held the bridge.

HUGH TALBOT. You five——

JOHN TALBOT. Bourke is dead, sir, and Tregarris, and Langdale, and—James Talbot, my brother.

DRISCOLL. And we've had no water, sir, these many hours.

HUGH TALBOT. So! You're wounded, Phelimy.

DRISCOLL. 'Tis not worth heeding, sir.

HUGH TALBOT. Kit! Kit!

[*At the voice* NEWCOMBE *pulls himself together.*

A light here! Dick, you've your pouch under your hand?

FENTON. 'Tis here, sir. [*Offers his tobacco-pouch.*

HUGH TALBOT [*filling his pipe*]. Leave the window, Myles! They've promised us a half-hour's truce—and Cromwell's a man of his word.

NEWCOMBE [*bringing a lighted candle*]. He'll let us pass free now, sir, will he not?

HUGH TALBOT [*lighting his pipe at the candle*]. You're not afraid, Kit?

NEWCOMBE. I? Faith, no, sir. No! Not now!

HUGH TALBOT. Sit ye down, Phelimy lad! You look dead on your feet. Give me to see that arm!

[*As* HUGH TALBOT *starts toward* DRISCOLL *his eye falls on the open keg of powder. He draws back hastily, covering his lighted pipe.*

Jack Talbot! Who taught ye to leave your powder uncovered where lighted match was laid?

BUTLER. My blame, sir. [*Covers the keg.*

JOHN TALBOT. We opened the keg, and then——

FENTON. Truth, we did not cover it again, being somewhat pressed for time. [*The five laugh, half hysterically.*

HUGH TALBOT [*sitting by fire*]. And you never thought, maybe, that in that keg there was powder enough to blow the Bridge of Cashala to hell?

JOHN TALBOT. It seemed a matter of small moment, sir.

HUGH TALBOT. Small moment! Powder enough, put case ye set it there, at the stairhead—d'ye follow me?—powder enough to make an end of Cashala Bridge for all

time—aye, and of all within the gatehouse. You never thought on that, eh ?

JOHN TALBOT. We had so much to think on, sir.

HUGH TALBOT. I did suspect as much. So I came hither to recall the powder to your minds.

DRISCOLL. We thought——

[BUTLER *motions him to be silent.*

We thought maybe you would not be coming at all, sir. Maybe you would be dead.

HUGH TALBOT. Well ? What an if I had been dead ? You had your orders. You did not dream of giving up the Bridge of Cashala—eh, Myles Butler ?

BUTLER [*after a moment*]. No, sir.

HUGH TALBOT. Nor you, Dick Fenton ?

FENTON. Sir, I—— No !

HUGH TALBOT [*smoking throughout*]. Good lads ! The wise heads were saying I was a stark fool to set you here at Cashala. But I said : I can be trusting the young riders that are learning their lessons in war from me. I'll be safe putting my honour in their hands. And I was right, wasn't I, Phelimy Driscoll ?

DRISCOLL. Give us the chance, sir, and we'll be holding Cashala, even against the devil himself !

FENTON. Aye, well said !

HUGH TALBOT. Sure, 'tis a passing good substitute for the devil sits yonder in Cromwell's tent.

NEWCOMBE [*with a shudder*]. Cromwell !

HUGH TALBOT. Aye, he was slaying your brother at Drogheda, Kit, and a fine, gallant lad your brother was. And I'm thinking you're like him, Kit. Else I shouldn't be trusting you here at Cashala.

NEWCOMBE. I—I—— Will they let us keep our swords ?

HUGH TALBOT. Well, it's with yourselves it lies, whether you'll keep them or not.

FENTON. He means—we mean—on what terms, sir, do we surrender ?

HUGH TALBOT. Surrender ? Terms ?

JOHN TALBOT. We thought, sir, from your coming under their white flag—perhaps you had made terms for us.

HUGH TALBOT. How could I make terms ?

NEWCOMBE. Captain !

[*At a look from* HUGH TALBOT *he becomes silent, fighting for self-control.*

HUGH TALBOT. How could I make terms that you would hear to ? Cashala Bridge is the gate of Connaught.

JOHN TALBOT. Yes.

HUGH TALBOT. Give Cromwell Cashala Bridge, and he'll be on the heels of our women and our little ones. At what price would ye be selling their safety ?

DRISCOLL. Cromwell—when he takes us—when he takes us——

NEWCOMBE. He'll knock us on the head !

HUGH TALBOT. Yes. At the last. Your five lives against our people's safety. You'd not give up the bridge ?

JOHN TALBOT. Five ? Our five ? But you—you are the sixth.

FENTON. You stay with us, Captain. And then we'll fight—you'll see how we shall fight.

HUGH TALBOT. I shall be seeing you fight, perhaps, but I cannot stay now at Cashala. [*Rises.*

DRISCOLL. Ye won't be staying with us ?

BUTLER [*laughing harshly*]. Now, on my soul ! Is this your faith, Hugh Talbot ? One liar I've followed, Charles Stuart, the son of a liar, and now a second liar——

JOHN TALBOT [*catching* BUTLER'S *throat*]. A plague choke you !

HUGH TALBOT [*stepping between* JOHN TALBOT *and* BUTLER]. Ha' done, Jack ! Ha' done ! What more, Myles Butler ?

BUTLER. Tell us whither you go, when you turn your back on us that shall die at Cashala—you that come walk-

ing under the rebel flag—that swore to bring us aid—and have not brought it! Tell us whither you go now!

HUGH TALBOT. Well, I'm a shade doubtful, Myles, my lad, though hopeful of the best.

BUTLER. 'Tis to Cromwell you go—you that have made your peace with him—that have sold us——

DRISCOLL. Captain! A' God's name, what is it that you're meaning?

HUGH TALBOT. I mean that you shall hold the Bridge of Cashala—whatever happen to you—whatever happen to me——

FENTON. To you? Captain Talbot!

HUGH TALBOT. I am going unto Cromwell—as you said, Myles. I gave my promise.

DRISCOLL. Your promise?

JOHN TALBOT. We—have been very blind. So—they made you prisoner?

HUGH TALBOT. Aye, Jack. When I tried to cut my way through to bring you aid. And they granted me this half-hour on my parole to come unto you.

JOHN TALBOT. To come——

HUGH TALBOT. To counsel you to surrender. And I have given you counsel. Hold the bridge! Hold it! Whatever they do!

DRISCOLL. Captain! Captain Talbot! God of Heaven! If you go back—'tis killed you'll be among them!

HUGH TALBOT. A little sooner than you lads? Aye, true!

FENTON. They cannot! Even Cromwell——

HUGH TALBOT. Tut, tut, Dick! It's little ye know of Cromwell.

JOHN TALBOT. Then—you mean——

HUGH TALBOT. An you surrender Cashala, we may all six pass free. An you hold Cashala, they will hang me, here before your eyes. [DRISCOLL *gives a rattling cry.*

BUTLER. God forgive me!

HUGH TALBOT. You have your orders. Hold the bridge! [*Turns to door.*

JOHN TALBOT [*barring his way*]. No, no! You shan't go forth!

FENTON. God's mercy, no!

HUGH TALBOT. Are you stark crazed?

FENTON. You shall stay with us.

JOHN TALBOT. What's your pledged word to men that know not honour?

HUGH TALBOT. My word. Unbar the door, Jack. Why, lad, we're travelling the same road.

FENTON. God! But we'll give them a good fight at the last. [*Goes to the shot-window.* Take up your musket, Kit.

NEWCOMBE. But I—Captain! When you are gone—I—I——

HUGH TALBOT. I'll not be far. You'll hold the bridge?

JOHN TALBOT. Aye, sir.

BUTLER. We've powder enough—you said it, sir—laid there at the stairhead, to blow the bridge to hell.

HUGH TALBOT. Aye, Myles, you've hit it! [*Holds out his hand.*

BUTLER. Not yet, sir!

HUGH TALBOT. Hereafter, then. God speed you, lads!

JOHN TALBOT. Speed you, sir!

[*All five stand at salute as* HUGH TALBOT *goes out. In the moment's silence upon his exit,* JOHN TALBOT *bars the door and turns to his comrades.*

You have—Hugh Talbot's orders. Take your pieces! Driscoll! Newcombe! [*Obediently the two join* FENTON *at windows.*

Butler!

BUTLER. Aye! We have Hugh Talbot's orders. [*Points to powder-keg.*

JOHN TALBOT. Are you meaning——

BUTLER. It's not I will be failing him now!

FENTON [*at window*]. God! They waste no time.

JOHN TALBOT. Already—they have dared——

FENTON. Here—this moment—under our very eyes!

DRISCOLL. Christ Jesus!

[*Goes back from the window, with his arm across his eyes, and falls on his knees in headlong prayer.*

JOHN TALBOT. Kit! Kit Newcombe!

[*Motions him to window.*

NEWCOMBE. I cannot! I——

JOHN TALBOT. Look forth! Look! And remember—when you meet them—remember!

[NEWCOMBE *stands swaying, clutching at the grating of the window, as he looks forth.*

Lads!

[*Motions to* BUTLER *and* FENTON *to carry the powder to the stairhead.*

The time is short. His orders!

[DRISCOLL *raises his head and gazes fixedly toward the centre of the room.*

FENTON. Yonder, at the stairhead.

BUTLER. Aye.

[FENTON *and* BUTLER *carry the keg to the door.*

NEWCOMBE. Not that! Not that death! No! No!

JOHN TALBOT. Be silent! And look yonder! Driscoll! Fetch the light! Newcombe! Come! You have your places, all.

DRISCOLL. But, Captain! The sixth man—where will the sixth man be standing?

[*There is a blank silence, in which the men look questioningly at* DRISCOLL'S *rapt face and at one another.*

JOHN TALBOT. Sixth?

FENTON. What sixth?

DRISCOLL. The blind eyes of ye! Yonder!

[*Comes to the salute, even as, a few moments before, he has saluted* HUGH TALBOT, *living.*

[NEWCOMBE *gives a smothered cry, as one who half sees, and takes courage.* FENTON *dazedly starts to salute. Outside a bugle sounds, and a voice, almost at the door, is heard to speak.*

VOICE OUTSIDE. For the last time, will you surrender you ?

JOHN TALBOT [*in a loud and confident voice*]. No ! Not while our commander stands with us !

VOICE OUTSIDE. And who might your commander be ?

JOHN TALBOT. Hugh Talbot, the Captain of the Gate ! The light here, Phelimy.

[JOHN TALBOT *bends to set the candle to the powder that shall destroy Cashala gatehouse, and all within it. His mates are gathered round him, with steady, bright faces, for in the little space left vacant in their midst they know in that minute that* HUGH TALBOT *stands.*

CURTAIN

ELEGANT EDWARD

By Gertrude E. Jennings
and E. Boulton

CHARACTERS

Burglar Bill
"Mr Treherne"
Mrs Treherne
Sergeant Beckett } *of the Metro-*
P.C. Hodson } *politan Police*

The action takes place in Mrs Treherne's flat in Mayfair.

This play was produced on Tuesday, May 30, 1916, at the Haymarket Theatre, London, with the following cast:

Burglar Bill . . .	Randle Ayrton
"Mr Treherne" . . .	Ben Webster
Mrs Treherne . . .	Mary Ridley
Sergeant Beckett . .	Henry Baynton
P.C. Hodson . . .	Henry Daniel

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY PLOT

Used at the Haymarket Theatre

Stage cloth

Aubusson square

White bearskin at fireplace

White furniture

A settee, armchair, three chairs, round table
Two large bookcases
Writing bureau filled with papers, etc.
Mahogany table
Coal-box
Small mahogany stool and bowl of roses
Three cushions
Fender and fireirons

On mantelpiece

Gilt clock and glass case
Two blue-and-white vases

In secret cupboard

Diamond necklace in case

Off stage centre

Bowl and handkerchief
Carafe of water and glass

Personal

Jemmy for "Mr Treherne"
Case of tools for Burglar Bill and torch
Book and pencil for Police Sergeant

Effects off

Electric door-bell

ELEGANT EDWARD [1]

SCENE: *Room in* TREHERNE'S *flat in St George's Court, Mayfair.*

Double doors in the centre. Window at the left, with heavy curtain above fireplace, also on the left. The following furniture is necessary: two bookcases, one each side of centre doors; a bureau on the right; a round table right of centre, with a chair on the left-hand side of it; a settee down left of centre, at the head a small table and chair; an armchair in front of the fireplace; a small chair below the bureau, right. Scene in darkness when curtain rises, window curtains are drawn aside, moonlight shows. BILL *enters, he turns up his lamp, sees the room is empty, draws curtain, goes to centre door, looks off, turns on lamp on bureau, brings out instruments, and begins to work at it. Suddenly lights go up and the door opens, and a good-looking young man in evening dress enters.* BILL *turns instantly.*

BILL. Put up yer 'ands.

[*Right, kneeling behind table, aiming pistol.*

"MR TREHERNE." I? Certainly not.

BILL. You're a dead man if you don't.

"MR TREHERNE." What nonsense! [*Closing door.*

BILL. Nonsense?

"MR TREHERNE." Utter nonsense. You know quite well you daren't shoot.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C. 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

BILL. Daren't be——

"MR TREHERNE." Hsh! Don't raise your voice. Mrs Treherne, my wife, is not at all well. The least noise would be fatal. And don't look so ferocious. It's silly, it's really silly. [*He removes coat, puts it over back of chair.*

BILL [*rising*]. I'll show you——

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, no, you won't! The policeman, whom you dodged quite cleverly, is now opposite this house. Let that little thing off, and you'll swing for it.

BILL. Curse yer jaw—I——

"MR TREHERNE." Certainly. But don't curse so loud. Mrs Treherne—you remember—I can see [*sitting*] you have a good heart, because you have such a plain face. A rough diamond—very rough. You had to take to this life because you were unlucky. Isn't it so?

BILL. I took to this life becos I bloomin' well wanted to, see?

"MR TREHERNE." Strange taste.

BILL. I don't want none of your lip. I could do you in without any shootin', come to that.

"MR TREHERNE." Don't, my dear soul, don't. I should have to make potted beef or ham of you and then drop the tin over that balcony. Of course, if you don't believe me——

BILL. Curse you. [*Rises.*] I'm getting out of this.

[*Moving across centre to window up left.*

"MR TREHERNE" [*rising*]. Oh, no, Burglar Bill, you're not. [*Jerks him across stage to right by wrist.*] I'm just beginning to like you. [*Patting up cushions on settee and sitting at full length*] Stay with me, and tell me the story of your life and how your angel mother died and left you in a hungry world.

BILL. My mother ain't a angel.

"MR TREHERNE." Well, then, your little blue-eyed lassie passed away and you went to the bad. Come, come, own up to a blue-eyed lassie.

BILL. I'll blue your eye so's you won't know yourself.

"MR TREHERNE." Come on, then.

BILL. Bloomin' nut!

"MR TREHERNE." Do talk to me. Tell me why I have the honour of this visit. Perhaps you came in to see the housemaid?

BILL. Curse all 'ousemaids.

"MR TREHERNE." To inquire after Mrs Treherne?

BILL. Curse——

"MR TREHERNE." No, no. My wife's a very nice woman. Well, what *did* you come for, Burglar Bill?

BILL. My name ain't Burglar Bill.

"MR TREHERNE." Really! You look so like it. What is your name then?

BILL. It's Bill.

"MR TREHERNE." There, I told you so. I knew it was. Don't make me laugh. And what did you come here for?

BILL. After your necklace, wot you've bought.

"MR TREHERNE." Oh! Have I a necklace, what I've bought?

BILL [*scornfully*]. 'Ave you a necklace!

"MR TREHERNE." On my soul, I didn't know. What's it like?

BILL. It's the Duchess of Colchester's diamond necklace.

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, really.

BILL. Oh, reely. Yes, it is. And if you'd bin a gent and gone out to-night as you'd arranged, I'd 'ave 'ad them stones safe by now.

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, I was to go out, was I?

BILL. Yes, they swore Mr Treherne was out to-night at a gambling-hell.

"MR TREHERNE." You shock me. It's a slander, believe me. But I quite see your point. It's hard luck on you. You see, my wife was ill, so I came home early. Too bad. All the same, I hardly see how you would have

found the necklace. It's extraordinarily well hidden. I think I should have caught you.

BILL. You think a bloomin' lot too much. I can find anythink in five minutes.

"MR TREHERNE." Can you now! Where is the necklace then?

BILL. Think I'm going to do tricks for you—you pock-marked——

"MR TREHERNE." I'm sure you will, because you've such charming manners, *and* you're so obliging. Besides, if you don't I'll call the police.

BILL. You will—you—— [*Advancing.*

"MR TREHERNE." Don't touch me, for your own sake——

[BILL *suddenly dashes at him, but* "MR TREHERNE" *with a ju-jitsu catch makes him fall left of settee. He gets up and rushes at* TREHERNE *again, with same result.*

[BILL *is now cowed; he is right centre.*

"MR TREHERNE" [*who has remained perfectly cool throughout*]. Now you'll tell me, won't you?

BILL [*whimpering*]. Wot d'yer want to know for?

"MR TREHERNE." That's *my* business.

BILL. Well, I ain't found it yet, so there.

"MR TREHERNE." Where have you looked?

BILL. Only in the bloomin' booro. I ain't 'ad 'arf a chance—you comin' in——

"MR TREHERNE." Thank you *so* much for not raising your voice. You must come over one day and play hunt the slipper with us. My wife would be so pleased. But I don't believe you'll ever win a prize. [BILL *rises.*] Good evening.

BILL. You're going to let me off?

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, yes. I feel you've had such a dull time of it. You've had to climb so high and jump so many balconies all for nothing. Of course, you know, you needn't trouble to come *again*. Shall we leave it

that you don't call unless I write? Yes? Thanks so much. [BILL *gets tools.*] Good-bye, Burglar Bill. Give my love to your aunt.

BILL. You're balmy, that's wot it is. Balmy!

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, *don't* bother to pack your things. My man will do it for you. We'll send them after you by Carter Paterson.

BILL. Wot yer gassin' about? I ain't goin' without my outfit. Blimey if I think you're fit to be out, old man.

"MR TREHERNE." *You* won't be unless you go soon. Now trot along. *I* should take the door if I were you. I hardly think that balcony's quite safe.

BILL. I come along clever, without being seen.

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, no, you didn't. I saw you most distinctly. I shouldn't risk it again, dear old man. Walk right out of the front door, and mind you shut it behind you. *Good* night. [*Opens door.*] Better luck next time, only let it be somewhere else.

BILL. You're as good as a moral. You've hypnopolised me. [*Exit.*

["MR TREHERNE" *watches him off—then closes doors and quickly draws on a white glove, produces a jemmy, which he places on table. Draws on second glove, and proceeds to examine top drawers of bureau. He then prises open two bottom drawers and brings them to table. As he is examining contents of second one* MRS TREHERNE'S *voice is heard.*

VOICE OFF. Grace! Is that you?

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, hang it all!

[*Listens, hears step, crosses stage to the left, throws himself in chair with high back.*

[MRS TREHERNE *enters.*

MRS TREHERNE. Grace! Not here! [*Sees disorder.*] Why——! [*Advances into room, sees* "MR TREHERNE."] Oh! ["MR TREHERNE" *groans.*

Who are you ? What's the matter ? Who in the world are you ? [*He groans.*] Water ! [*Exit hurriedly.*

[" MR TREHERNE " *sits up, looks under carpet, hears her returning, sinks back, groans again.* MRS TREHERNE *re-enters, goes to him.*

MRS TREHERNE. Try and drink this. [*He drinks.*] Better ?

" MR TREHERNE." Much better, thank you. Is it a vision ?

MRS TREHERNE. Is what a vision ?

" MR TREHERNE." Something so beautiful bending over me, I thought I must be in fairyland.

MRS TREHERNE. Would you mind telling me who you are, and what has happened ?

" MR TREHERNE." Call me Bertie. I must pull myself together.

MRS TREHERNE. Drink some more water.

" MR TREHERNE." No more, thanks. [*Takes water and places it left of him.*] My name is Sir John Carey. [MRS TREHERNE *sits.*] Here is my card. [*She takes it.*] I've taken the flat over this. Coming in to-night, I noticed a horrible-looking ruffian climb over the connecting balcony and enter this room. I ran upstairs, saw your door open——

MRS TREHERNE. Open !

" MR TREHERNE." So I rushed in to see if I could be of any use. I had heard you were ill. You are Mrs Treherne, aren't you ?

MRS TREHERNE. Yes, yes, but please go on.

" MR TREHERNE." I was afraid your husband might be out.

MRS TREHERNE. Yes, he is.

" MR TREHERNE." Well, of course, I thought I ought to see if anything was wrong. So I came in. What did I see ?

MRS TREHERNE. Yes, what *did* you see ?

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, my poor head. [MRS TREHERNE *places cushion for him.*] Thank you so much. I saw a ruffian—a criminal of the blackest dye, you know—inky, blue-black—in the act of burgling your room.

MRS TREHERNE. No, no.

"MR TREHERNE." Yes, yes——

MRS TREHERNE. What did you do ?

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, my head.

MRS TREHERNE. Shall I get you some brandy ?

"MR TREHERNE." Frightfully good of you, really. I think it might clear my brains. [*She goes out to the right.*

[*He rises and goes to fireplace.*

[*She enters.*

MRS TREHERNE. I'm afraid I *can't* get it. My husband has the keys. I'm so sorry. [*Sits down left.*

"MR TREHERNE." Yes, I'm sorry too. Will your husband be in soon ?

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, no, he'll be very late.

"MR TREHERNE." What a pity ! Still, your servants will look after you.

MRS TREHERNE. They're out too, except Grace, and she's deaf.

"MR TREHERNE" [*delighted*]. Is she ? I mean, how very selfish.

MRS TREHERNE. But, please, Sir John, do tell me what happened ? [*Puts hand on his arm ; he strokes it.*

"MR TREHERNE." Ah, yes. Well, I asked this wretched man what he was doing. He replied in the most brazen way that he was after the Duchess of Colchester's diamond necklace.

MRS TREHERNE. Oh ! Of course—my husband only brought it home yesterday. Oh, if it has gone—— [*Crosses to fireplace and gets necklace out of trick box.*] No ! What a relief ! [*Shows it to him.*

"MR TREHERNE" [*he almost takes it*]. What a pretty thing !

MRS TREHERNE. Yes, isn't it? I must tell you all about it later. But go on. Of course, you called the police?

[*Puts necklace back.*

"MR TREHERNE." Well, no, I didn't. [*She, astonished, sits.*] No. You see, he told me such a piteous story—about his angel mother.

MRS TREHERNE. His mother!

"MR TREHERNE." Yes. And his blue-eyed lass. Quite touchin', don't you know. Anythin' like that about a woman always gives me a lump in the throat. She was dreadfully false to him—yes, drove him to despair and to your necklace.

MRS TREHERNE. But surely you didn't let him go?

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, no, no. [*She sits.*] That wouldn't be right. I told him I would help him to be a better man. Poor feller—he was so grateful. Quite broke down. And just as I was consoling him he banged me over the head with his revolver.

MRS TREHERNE. The brute.

"MR TREHERNE." Yes, rather coarse, wasn't it? But they have so many temptations.

MRS TREHERNE. Oh! [*Rises, crosses centre.*] I wonder if he has taken anything else.

"MR TREHERNE" [*half rises*]. Is there anything else?

MRS TREHERNE. My husband buys these things, you see, to sell again. But he doesn't always bring them home, only I specially wanted to see this necklace. He will be so grateful. You'll wait till he comes, won't you?

"MR TREHERNE" [*looking at clock*]. I'm afraid I mustn't do that, but if I could stay just a few minutes more——

MRS TREHERNE. Of course. [*He groans.*

MRS TREHERNE. It's that nasty knock on the head.

[*Crosses behind him for water and back to right of settee.*

"MR TREHERNE." Yes, and it's not only my head.

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, dear !

" MR TREHERNE." No, not only my head.

[*He takes glass.*

MRS TREHERNE. Now, really !

" MR TREHERNE." Was that some one at the front door ?

[*She turns to look, and he empties the half-filled glass of water over a plant.*

MRS TREHERNE [*at back*]. I don't think so. I wish I could get you a glass of wine or something.

" MR TREHERNE." It doesn't matter a bit. But if I could have another glass of water ?

MRS TREHERNE. Of course. I'll get it.

" MR TREHERNE." Yes. My head swims. Plenty of water.

MRS TREHERNE. I think perhaps if I dip a handkerchief in *eau de Cologne* it might do you good.

" MR TREHERNE." You think of everything.

[*She exits. He darts to fireplace. He hastily resumes position, groaning, as she returns.*

MRS TREHERNE. I'm afraid you'll think me very silly, but I feel quite nervous at going out into the passage alone. Do you mind standing by this door where I can see you all the time ? I shall feel *quite* safe then.

" MR TREHERNE " [*rises*]. Yes. I think then you'll be perfectly safe.

MRS TREHERNE. Thank you so much.

[*She exits. He stands at door.*

MRS TREHERNE. I shan't be a moment.

" MR TREHERNE." Oh, that's all right.

[*He makes dart towards the necklace occasionally, always to be called back by her voice.*

MRS TREHERNE [*off*]. So silly of me to be so nervous.

" MR TREHERNE." Not a bit. I'm sure you've every reason.

MRS TREHERNE. Fancy if I'd come into the room and found a horrid burglar there.

" MR TREHERNE." Yes. Just fancy.

MRS TREHERNE. I think I should have fainted away.

" MR TREHERNE." Oh, I don't believe you would.

[*Moving towards fire.*

MRS TREHERNE. You're still there, aren't you ?

" MR TREHERNE " [*back to door*]. Yes, rather. Nothing shall make me move.

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, hang !

" MR TREHERNE." What did you say ?

MRS TREHERNE. I can't find the *eau de Cologne.*

" MR TREHERNE." What a nuisance !

MRS TREHERNE. So annoying, when you know exactly where a thing is, and yet you can't put your hand on it.

" MR TREHERNE." Yes, I know exactly what you mean.

[*She enters.*

MRS TREHERNE. I'm very sorry to be so silly.

" MR TREHERNE." I don't think you're a bit silly. You're one of the most sensible women I've ever met.

[*She draws him down to settee. He on the right, she on the left of it.*

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, dear ! That makes me feel rather middle-aged.

" MR TREHERNE." You'll never be that.

MRS TREHERNE [*she sits on left of settee, bathing his head*]. Alas—I shall indeed. Now put up your feet and let me bathe your head. Age is a thing you men never have to worry about.

" MR TREHERNE." What makes you think we men don't worry over growing old ?

MRS TREHERNE. I don't say old. Of course, it's horrid to be really decrepit. But middle age—thirty—the most attractive age a man can be—forty—he's still charming—even fifty.

" MR TREHERNE." Oh, come !

MRS TREHERNE. Yes, yes. Does that feel better ?

"MR TREHERNE." It's heaven.

MRS TREHERNE. Heaven and fairyland ! [*Stops bathing his head.*] This does seem a nice flat.

"MR TREHERNE." It's a most attractive flat.

MRS TREHERNE. But yours must be just as nice ?

"MR TREHERNE." No, this flat holds something so priceless that mine looks like dirt beside it.

MRS TREHERNE [*coyly*]. Something priceless ?

"MR TREHERNE." Yes. Something I haven't been lucky enough to obtain.

MRS TREHERNE [*sentimentally*]. Perhaps you'll obtain it some day.

"MR TREHERNE" [*sighing*]. I *hope* so.

[*She bathes his hands.*

[*A prolonged ringing of an electric bell.*

Your husband ! Or the milk !

MRS TREHERNE. Surely not. He can't have come home yet. Besides, he has a key. [*The bell rings again.*

"MR TREHERNE." Who can it be, then ?

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, my heart is beating like a hammer.

"MR TREHERNE." Yes. I know what you mean.

[*The bell rings again.*

MRS TREHERNE. Do you mind answering it ? I don't think I dare.

"MR TREHERNE" [*rises*]. Of course. [*Staggers.*] I hardly think I can.

MRS TREHERNE. Someone's coming in ! How very extraordinary !

"MR TREHERNE." Isn't it ? I must have left the door open. [*Enter* POLICE SERGEANT.

"MR TREHERNE." What on earth——

POLICE SERGEANT [*outside doors*]. Excuse me, sir, but we've reason to think a burglary's bin committed in one of these 'ere flats, and we want to find out which one it is, and what's missing. ["MR TREHERNE" *takes necklace.*

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, come in, officer. Yes, it *was* here, but it's been prevented. The man was caught and——

POLICE SERGEANT. Not caught, mum, beggin' your pardon. Leastways, not in 'ere. I may say as I caught 'im, mum. I come upon 'im hanging round outside these 'ere flats.

"MR TREHERNE" [*crosses to the right*]. Oh, the mug!

POLICE SERGEANT. What did you say, sir?

"MR TREHERNE." Nothing.

POLICE SERGEANT. I ast 'im what he was a-doing of, and 'is reply not bein' satisfactory, I took 'im up on suspicion. And I finds 'is tools on 'im.

"MR TREHERNE." Balmy.

POLICE SERGEANT. I bin down below where all's well, then I gets the 'all porter to let us up here.

MRS TREHERNE. He did attempt this flat, officer, as you see, but this gentleman came in just in time.

POLICE SERGEANT. Well, in a manner of speaking he was in time, mum, but if *I* 'adn't bin down below on the look-out, where'd we all be? Credit where credit's due, that's what I say.

"MR TREHERNE." By all means. [*Picks up coat.*] I think I'd better leave you, Mrs Treherne, now that you're under police protection.

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, yes, I've kept you here so long.

POLICE SERGEANT. Excuse me, sir, but if you wouldn't mind, I'd like you to confront the prisoner wot I've taken up, so's you can identify him before I make the charge.

"MR TREHERNE." Oh! Is that necessary?

POLICE SERGEANT. Certainly, sir. With your permission —he's just outside with one of my men—I'll fetch 'im.

MRS TREHERNE. *Please* don't let gangs of police wait outside my door. It'll look so extraordinary, I shall have every one in here.

["MR TREHERNE" *puts down his coat again.*

POLICE SERGEANT. Don't disturb yourself, mum. I'll station 'im downstairs; the 'all porter can be at this 'ere door. I never give more trouble than I can 'elp.

MRS TREHERNE. Thank you so much. [*Sits.*

[POLICE SERGEANT *exits.*

Oh, dear, what a terrible affair! [*He crosses behind her.*] I feel so shaken.

"MR TREHERNE" [*sits*]. There, there! Don't worry! I would have spared you this if I could. [*Bathes her head.*] I did my level best to keep the police out of it. [*Bathing her hand*] I did indeed.

MRS TREHERNE. I know you did.

[*Enter* POLICE SERGEANT *with* BILL.

POLICE SERGEANT. Now, sir, is this 'ere the man?

["MR TREHERNE" *crosses to the right, bathing his own head.*

"MR TREHERNE." No. That's not the man.

POLICE SERGEANT [*taken aback*]. *Not?*

MRS TREHERNE. Surely it must be! You said he was a horrible-looking scoundrel! That dreadful blow he gave you on the head has made you forget.

BILL. I never touched 'is 'ead. I swear I didn't.

POLICE SERGEANT. There, 'e's owned up. You must be mistaken, sir.

"MR TREHERNE" [*puts down bowl*]. No, no, he simply means he wasn't here. Surely *I* ought to know. I tell you it's not the man at all, not in any way.

POLICE SERGEANT. Would you kindly describe the man, sir, as you did see? [*Notebook out.*

"MR TREHERNE." He was a red-haired chap. [BILL *ducks his head, which* OFFICER *pushes away.*] A long nose and a slight limp and nettlerash.

POLICE SERGEANT. Well, this is a rummy go.

"MR TREHERNE." Most.

POLICE SERGEANT. Do you wish to charge this 'ere man, mum?

MRS TREHERNE. No, of course I don't. I'd like him taken away, that's all. [*Sits back.*

POLICE SERGEANT. And you won't charge him, sir?

"MR TREHERNE." I? Of course not. It's nothing to do with me. He looks to me balmy. [*Puts on coat.*] Or perhaps he is hypnotised. Can we send him away now? It's so late, and I want to get to bed.

POLICE SERGEANT [*crosses to* "MR TREHERNE"]. I'd like the perticlers of the robbery, please, sir.

"MR TREHERNE." Certainly, Inspector. [*He pulls himself up.*] But not now. My head aches like billy oh! Here's my card. [SERGEANT *salutes.*] I'll attend any time you like to call me. Good night, Mrs Treherne. Don't get up.

MRS TREHERNE. Good night, Sir John, and thank you with all my heart for what you have done.

"MR TREHERNE." Ah, believe me, you have done far [*touching his breast*], far more for me than I have done for you. I shall never forget. Good-bye.

MRS TREHERNE. We shall see you again soon?

"MR TREHERNE." Who knows? Good-bye. [*To* POLICE SERGEANT] Good night. [*Exit.*

POLICE SERGEANT. Good evening, sir.

[POLICE SERGEANT *has been writing in notebook.*

BILL [*putting out hands*]. I say, guv'nor.

POLICE SERGEANT. Don't you talk to me.

BILL. Don't be snarkey, guv'nor, just becos you carn't get a medal off o' me.

POLICE SERGEANT [*to him*]. Wot's that got to do with you? Now, mum, I understand as you reely won't charge this man?

MRS TREHERNE. Certainly not. Take him away now, will you?

POLICE SERGEANT. He'll 'ave to be dismissed with a caution. [*Puts away book.*] That's the law.

MRS TREHERNE [*goes to him*]. Does that mean you have

to make a speech ? Because if so, do you very much mind —I'm so tired——

POLICE SERGEANT. That's all right, mum, we'll get on.

[*Enter* POLICEMAN.

POLICEMAN. Please, sergeant.

MRS TREHERNE. Oh, heavens, here's another !

POLICEMAN. Please, sergeant, I think as I ought to tell you——

MRS TREHERNE. Tell him outside, there's a good man.

POLICE SERGEANT. Come along, Hodson.

POLICEMAN. Excuse me, sergeant, but I think as 'ow I ought to say that as I was waiting on the curb, who should come down the stairs of these 'ere flats but Elegant Edward.

POLICE SERGEANT. Elegant Edward !

BILL. Elegant Edward !

POLICEMAN. Yes, sergeant, in evening dress, light top-coat, tall 'at, carried a cane. 'E sez to me—'e sez——

POLICE SERGEANT. Elegant Edward ! Are you sure ?

POLICEMAN. Sure ! I'd know him in an ant-heap.

POLICE SERGEANT. Elegant Edward ! Played us off as Sir John Carey.

MRS TREHERNE. What do you mean ? Who is Elegant Edward ? [*To below settee.*

POLICE SERGEANT. The smartest crook we've got.

MRS TREHERNE. That gentleman ! No, no.

[*Sits in chair left.*

BILL. 'Im a crook ! Why, he's balmy !

POLICE SERGEANT. You're right, Hodson. It *is* him !

POLICEMAN. Course it's him. 'E sez to me—'e sez——

POLICE SERGEANT. Get after him ! Go on ! Call up the beat.

POLICEMAN. 'E sez to me—'e sez——

POLICE SERGEANT. Be off, I tell you.

[*Exit* POLICEMAN.

BILL. 'Im Elegant Edward! Well, 'ow some people wins their reputations gets me in the middle.

POLICE SERGEANT [*hand on shoulder*]. Come along with me, you——

BILL. Whaffor?

POLICE SERGEANT. Confederates. You don't fool me twice.

BILL. Well, of all the bloomin' injustices! I'll write to *John Bull*, see if I don't!

POLICE SERGEANT. Come along a' me.

[*Passes him over.*

BILL. I 'ate the sight of the man, and as to doin' a job with 'im, why, I'd sooner work.

POLICE SERGEANT. All right. That's enough.

MRS TREHERNE. But, officer, do wait a moment! That gentleman can't have been a thief.

POLICE SERGEANT. Can't, mum? He *is*. And to think I 'ad 'im in my 'and! Look after your valuables, mum, if *he's* bin about. Do you miss anything?

MRS TREHERNE. He's never been out of my sight.

POLICE SERGEANT. That's nothing to 'im! He'd nab 'is bit under anyone's nose, 'cept, p'raps, mine.

MRS TREHERNE [*at fireplace*]. It's gone! It's witchcraft! [*Turns to them, case in hand.*

BILL. It's hypnoptilism.

POLICE SERGEANT. It's Elegant Edward. [*Pushes* BILL *out.*] Good night, mum. I'll look in ter-morrer for perticlers. But you'll never see it or Elegant Edward again.

MRS TREHERNE. What!

POLICE SERGEANT. Never again. Good night.

[*Closes doors.*

[*Exeunt.*

[MRS TREHERNE *crosses and sits on the right.*

[*Tap heard on window; she goes to it; second tap. She pulls aside curtains and starts back.*

[*Enter from balcony* "MR TREHERNE," *the necklace in his hand.*

MRS TREHERNE. You!

"MR TREHERNE." Yes.

MRS TREHERNE. Why have you come back?

"MR TREHERNE." To give you this.

MRS TREHERNE. You return it? Why?

"MR TREHERNE." I just had to. It wasn't fair, was it, to rob some one so kind and so sympathetic? [*Gives necklace.*] *And* so pretty. And you bathed my head with *eau de Cologne*. I *did* feel a cad! I couldn't spoil such a sweet memory, could I?

MRS TREHERNE. It's very, very good of you. I can't tell you [*comes down*] how touched I am. But you oughtn't to have risked all this for me. You see, you made a little mistake. This necklace isn't real. It's only a copy.

"MR TREHERNE." Oh, yes, I saw that. That's really why I brought it back.

CURTAIN

EXERCISES

Wee Macgreegor's Party : *J. J. Bell*

1. How does this play illustrate the saying that " Boys will be boys " ?
2. What do you think of Macgreegor's parents ?
3. Explain the importance of the prize in this play.
4. Which character do you find the most interesting, and why ?
5. What kind of a visitor does Aunt Purdie make at the party ?
6. Why is the part played by Willie important ?
7. Which strike you as being the most humorous (*a*) speeches, (*b*) situations, in this play ?

The Princess on the Road : *Kathleen Conyngham Greene*

1. What are the chief difficulties in staging this play, and how would you overcome them ? (If the Princess is not an expert, how can the juggling of the apples be ' faked ' ?)
2. What is a soliloquy ? Who soliloquizes in this play ? How do modern dramatists often avoid soliloquy ?
3. If you had to make Florimund appear, how would you do it ?
4. Explain carefully the importance of the juggler in this play.
5. Criticize the behaviour of the crowd.
6. Why do you think this is called a " dream play " ?

The Dyspeptic Ogre : *Percival Wilde*

1. Explain carefully in what respects this is a *modernized* fairy play.
2. Compare it with any pantomime you have seen.
3. Why is the Jester an important character ?
4. " Frances is perhaps a little sorry for the Ogre." Why ?
5. What is the chief surprise in the play ?
6. Describe the part played by the magic ring.
7. How does this ogre differ from other ogres you have read about ?
8. This is a fairy play. Where lies the moral ?

The Hordle Poacher : *Bernard Gilbert*

1. Why is the "Extract from County Directory" put at the beginning ?
2. What are the chief points in the character of the poacher ?
3. Which is the most enjoyable moment in the play ?
4. "Done—by a woman." Explain how this is the central idea of the comedy.
5. Of the three persons who appear, which do you consider the least important in the development of the play ?
6. Suggest a sequel.

The Knave of Hearts : *Louise Saunders*

1. Why is the Manager a necessary character ? What might he be called in a Shakespeare play ?
2. The Knave of Hearts was "no knave, but a very hero indeed." How does he become the hero of this story ?
3. What unexpected happenings occur, and how do they complicate the plot ?
4. Give some examples of humorous dialogue.
5. What is the unfinished proverb on page 102 ? Why is it apt ?
6. Show how the noble personages in this play are made to speak and act unconventionally. What modern touches can you discover ?
7. "Her ladyship is vain." Prove the truth of this statement.
8. Compare this play with *The Dyspeptic Ogre*. Which of them reminds you the more of a puppet (or marionette) play ?

The 'Ole in the Road : "*Seamark*"

1. This sketch has proved very successful as part of a wireless programme. Can you suggest why ?
2. Quote some of the workman's most amusing remarks.
3. What do you think was the author's purpose in writing the play ? Was it merely to amuse ?
4. "Family influence." Explain this reference.
5. What is the only thing that actually happens in this sketch ? (The rest is dialogue.)

The Oak Settle : *Harold Brighouse*

1. Compare this play with *The Hordle Poacher*. What qualities have Ellen Hudson and Anne Barton in common ?

2. Quote speeches to illustrate the attraction of the oak settle.
3. This piece may be described as a rural comedy. What new light does it throw on country life and character ?
4. Would you call Josiah old-fashioned ?
5. Contrast the two wives.
6. " The thieves ! " Explain the irony of this remark.
7. Criticize the beginning and the ending of this play. How far is the description of the farmhouse kitchen necessary ?

Shivering Shocks ; or, The Hiding-place
Clemence Dane

1. What are the most exciting moments in this play ? Does it strike you as a good ' thriller ' ?
2. How would you show that it is essentially modern ?
3. Describe briefly any story you have read in which a formula plays an important part.
4. How are you prepared for Rowley's turning out to be Inspector Pollock ?
5. Explain carefully what use is made of *disguise* in this play.
6. Who is the hero ? Why do you think so ?
7. " What, you tricked me ? " Describe how this was done.
8. Criticize the title of the play.

Admiral Peters : *W. W. Jacobs and Horace Mills*

1. What do you notice about the beginning of this comedy ?
2. How far is your sympathy aroused for George Burton ?
3. Summarize the story in a few sentences (*i.e.*, write a short synopsis).
4. Show how the character of Mrs Dutton develops.
5. " You're a sarpint." How far was this true of Joe ?
6. Which is the most amusing situation in the play ?
7. Why is the ending effective ?

The Captain of the Gate : *Beulah Marie Dix*

1. What events important to the play occurred before the curtain rises ?
2. Why does one like the story in spite of its being a tragedy ?
3. How does the Captain influence the defenders of the gate-house, and so affect the ending of the play ?
4. What feelings does this tragedy excite in you ? Does any other play in this book arouse any of them ?

5. Describe briefly what you think happens after the curtain falls.
6. A famous historical personage is mentioned. How does he affect the plot without actually appearing on the stage ?

ELEGANT EDWARD : *Gertrude E. Jennings and E. Boulton*

1. Compare this with any other ' crook ' play you know.
2. Justify the epithet ' Elegant ' applied to the hero.
3. " He's the smartest crook we've got." Illustrate.
4. What opinion do you form of (*a*) the police, (*b*) the ordinary burglar, from this play ?
5. Would you call Mrs Treherne a very important character ? Is she cleverer than one would suppose at first sight ?
6. Why does Elegant Edward's return make a good ' curtain ' ?